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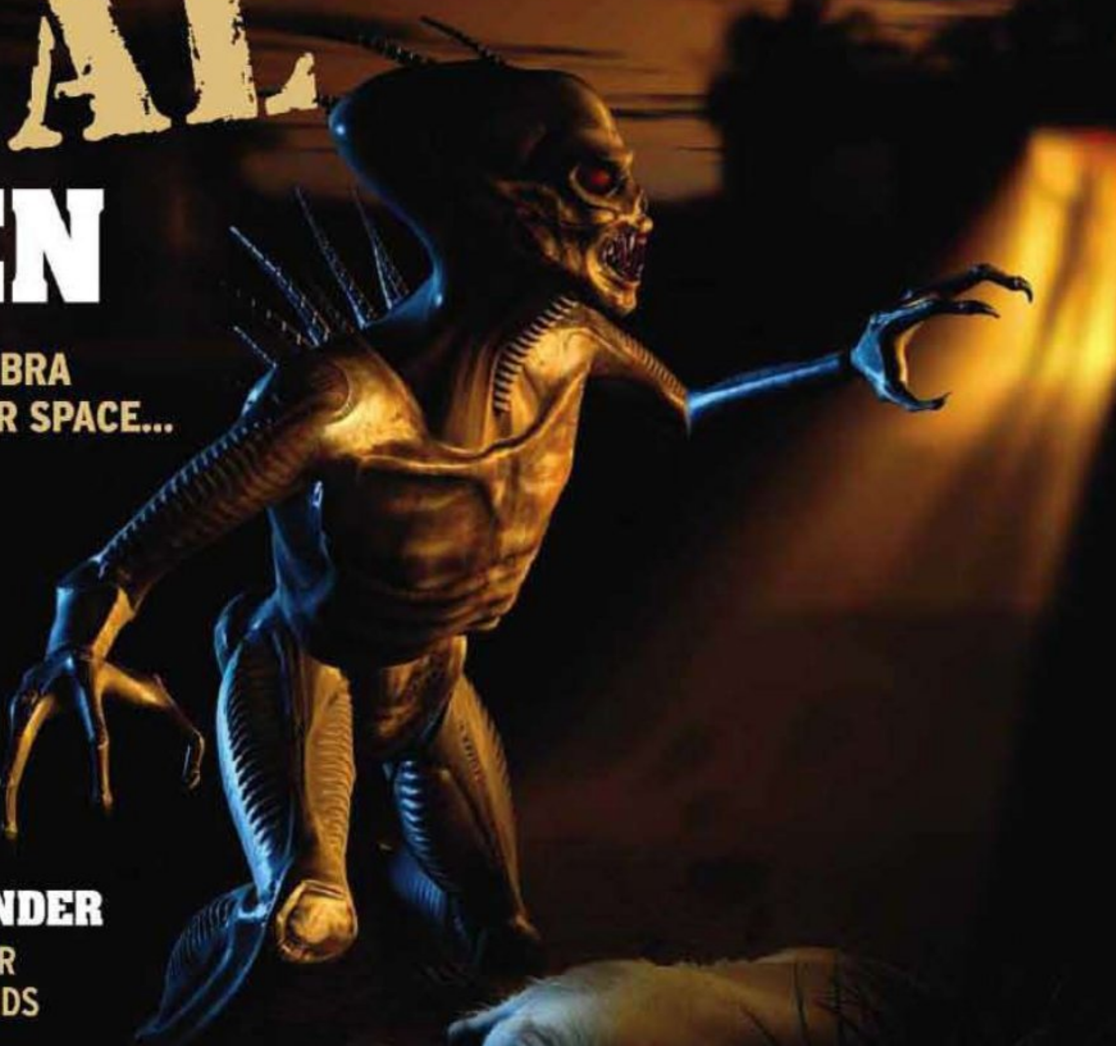

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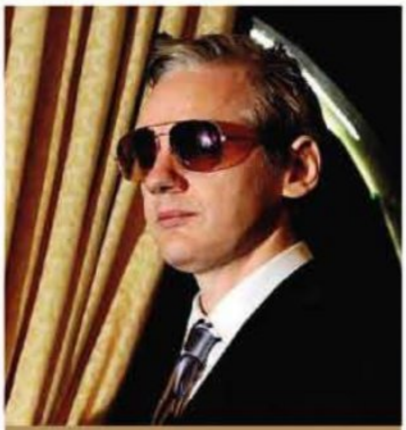

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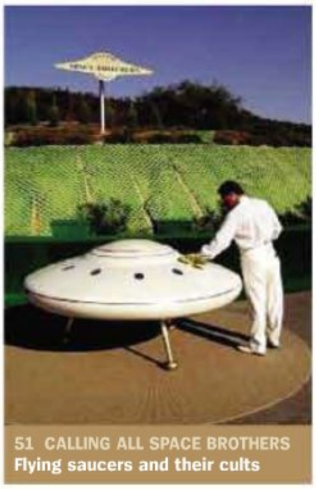

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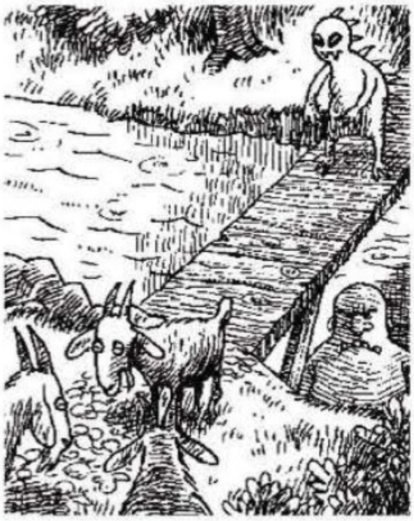
editorial

Leaks and alien look-alikes

CABLEGATE AND CONSPIRACY

As we go to press, Julian Assange, editor-in-chief of whistle-blowing organisation WikiLeaks, is due to appear at Westminster magistrate's court for his bail hearing. Whatever you may think of the man whose ongoing release of cables has been dubbed a "diplomatic 9/11", there's no denying that his actions have fired a debate on freedom of information of a kind never seen before. This affair will surely have huge implications for the arena of conspiracy theory, which relies on the existence of governmental and organisational secrecy to fuel its dark, paranoid narratives. Could a world of complete (if involuntary) disclosure signal the end of conspiracy theory as we know it? Assange has even said that files on UFOs will be leaked later this year – we suspect those will be a damp squib, leading, no doubt, to cries of "disinformation", but who knows? With an unprecedented cyber-war hotting up between WikiLeaks's supporters and opponents, these are interesting times – although with a story moving as fast as this one, our report (pp4–6) will undoubtedly have been overtaken by events by the time you read this.


"Right guys, this is a new challenge – troll under the bridge, chupacabra on it."

MARTIN ROSS

YOU SAY CHUPACABRAS, I SAY CHUPACABRA...

Has Benjamin Radford discovered what lay behind one of the most startling entity encounters of modern times – the chupacabra sighting by Madelyne Tolentino in Canovanas, Puerto Rico, in August 1995? Tolentino's detailed description sped around the world, cementing the image of the goat-sucking, alien-like monster in popular consciousness. But, asks Radford, was the eyewitness influenced by a film she'd recently seen – the Hollywood sci-fi blockbuster *Species* – and was the creature she described seeing really a confused recollection of the one designed for the film by the reclusive Swiss artist HR Giger? Well, there are certainly striking similarities between Tolentino's chupacabra and Giger's creature – whether Radford's solution (pp30–35) is correct or not, it's a new and intriguing one.

While we're on the subject, we thought we should reiterate our current understanding of the correct Spanish name for the goatsucker. Reader Richard Heiden points out that in Spanish *chupacabras* is both singular and plural, as it literally means "it sucks goats". This resembles other words like "windshield" (*parabrisas*, or "it stops breezes"). *FT*'s house style used to be to use the more grammatically correct *chupacabras*, until cryptozoologist Jon Downes pointed out that the *chupacabra* singular was now common usage in the Spanish-speaking US, Mesoamerica and the Caribbean. We checked with Danny Perez, a Latino-background cryptozoologist from the Los Angeles area whose mother teaches Spanish. He confirmed that *chupacabra* is street-Spanish and perfectly acceptable (both to him and his mother). At that point, we switched to the more modern usage – although we retain a sneaking fondness for *chupacabras*...

MISSILE MISTAKE

In last issue's 'UFO Files' (**FT270:30**) we printed a report by David Clarke and Andy Roberts on the work of American ufologist Robert Hastings. Hastings argues for evidence that aliens have visited Earth on a number of occasions to buzz our nuclear weapons facilities, including that at RAF Bentwaters, where – in Col Charles Halt's latest and most elaborate version of the Rendlesham incident – spacecraft fired beams of light at the weapons store. The report also mentioned an incident that allegedly took place at Malmstrom Air Force Base, Montana, in 1967, when a UFO hovered over a nuclear weapons store, causing Minuteman missiles to malfunction. Due to a lapse in communications, we printed the wrong text here, stating that the Malmstrom event had been questioned by James Carlson, whose "late father Eric, a Captain in the USAF, was present at the time" and had "insisted that UFOs had absolutely nothing to do with the failure of the missile system". Well, we're pleased to say that Eric Carlson is in fact very much alive, and we'd like to apologise to both him and his son James for any distress our mistake might have caused them and their families.

Meanwhile, Robert Hastings has promised to respond to our ufology team's criticisms of his research in a future *FT*.

DAVID SUTTON

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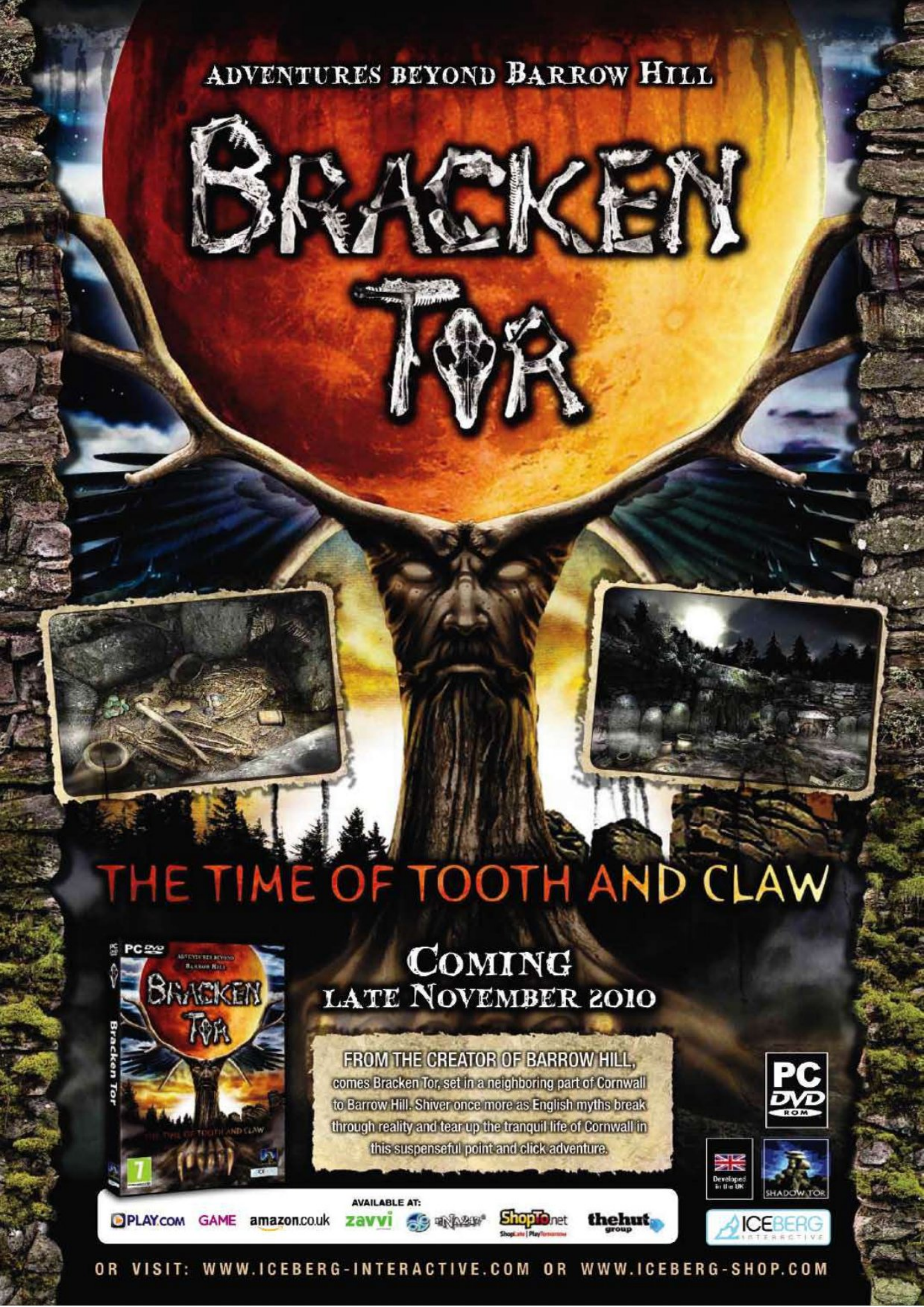
PAUL SIEVEKING

Why fortean?
Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!
SEE PAGE 78



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The WikiLeaks saga

ROBIN RAMSAY casts a conspiratorial eye over a story of information and disinformation...

On 28 November 2010, five major world newspapers – in Britain *The Guardian* – began publishing correspondence between the US State Department and its embassies around the world, given to them by WikiLeaks. An international network (so it is said) of journalists, academics, and computer experts, WikiLeaks (which has no connection to the online encyclopædia, Wikipedia) has created what it calls "an uncensorable system for untraceable mass document leaking" and claims that there are 251,287 of these State Department documents in its possession. Add those to the reported 400,000 Afghan war documents leaked in July and the 90,000 Iraq documents leaked in October and we have a mind-boggling, non-state challenge to the United States government, and especially its overseas arms. It truly is the hour of the computer hacktivist.

Or so it seems to most people. However, surrounding this international conspiracy of mysterious hacktivists, inevitably there are questions. In July it was very striking that Julian Assange, the public face of WikiLeaks, was able to travel into the UK, give a press conference in London to present the Afghanistan war documents, talk to the BBC's *Newsnight* the next day, and then leave without interference by UK authorities. All manner of relative small fry are banned from entering this country – the Home Office excluded 101 people, most of whom you will never have heard of, between August 2005 and 31 March 2009[1] – yet a man fronting the distribution of huge amounts of embarrassing US-UK operational secrets was allowed to come and go as if he were a tourist. This was surprising.

It truly is the hour of the computer hacktivist

And WikiLeaks is not above suspicion. On the first morning of what has inevitably become known as Cablegate, I got emails from two of my regular correspondents, both politically sophisticated, much-travelled people, well aware of the history of disinformation operations by intelligence and security services. One wondered if WikiLeaks was a British MI6 project, as the first – and thus the most memorable and most important – leaks seemed to be aimed at making trouble for the US in the Middle East. The other wondered if WikiLeaks was an American intelligence project, as the first batch of leaked documents provided (a) further rationales for an assault on Iran, reporting an apparent consensus among Arab states that Iran poses the greatest threat in the region; and (b) evidence that some of Pakistan's intelligence service are helping the Taliban, thus supporting the increasing US military presence and operations in that country.

The idea that WikiLeaks might be a US intelligence operation is not very plausible. Although it is possible to construct scenarios in which factions among the US intelligence community have organised the leaks, there is no evidence to support this. And it is just as easy to construct scenarios in which it was organised by Mossad, the Russian FSB, or the Chinese equivalent for different reasons – all of which have been mooted on the Internet's conspiracy forums. Asking "*Cui bono*?" ("who benefits?") in this instance does not produce a clear answer. Further, were an intelligence agency running WikiLeaks, would they have waited four years – which is how long it has been in existence – before using it for something substantial?

But if there is no evidence that WikiLeaks is an intelligence operation, there are still questions to be asked. An organisation which promises to publish leaked material is open to manipulation, with selective leaks or leaks containing disinformation among the genuine articles. On US television, President Jimmy Carter's National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, asked: "Who is feeding Wikileaks? They're getting a lot of information which seems trivial, inconsequential, but some of it seems surprisingly pointed… it may be getting stuff at the same time from interested intelligence parties who want to manipulate the process and achieve certain very specific objectives."[2]

Nobody has tried to claim that the embassy cables are fakes but it is clear that WikiLeaks, a small, clandestine organisation, could not authenticate even a fraction of the 250,000 apparent US State Department documents it claims to have in its possession. One of WikiLeaks's early supporters was John Young, who runs the American website Cryptome. Like Wikileaks, Young has published leaked material. But in 2005 he published a list of alleged IRA members and supporters, which included, for example, John Hume MP and Clare Short MP. Young had clearly made no attempt to authenticate the list, which appeared to have been compiled by Northern Irish Protestant paramilitaries.[3] Cryptome's publication of this absurd IRA list made it impossible for me to ever take seriously anything it published. For if Young could be fooled so easily in this area, what confidence could we have in any other? The world's intelligence agencies must be wondering how to plant disinformation on Wikileaks and discredit it.

Until recently, my assumption would have been that, in the end, the American military/intelligence people would deal with Wikileaks, shut it down and clobber some of the individuals concerned. But what if they can't? What if a decentralised, mobile, encrypted network is unstoppable? An anonymous blogger on *The Economist* website noted: "With or without WikiLeaks, the technology exists to allow whistleblowers to leak data and documents while maintaining anonymity. With or without WikiLeaks, the personnel, technical know-how, and ideological will exists to enable anonymous leaking and to make this information available to the public."[4]

We are into new territory with enormous ramifications.

SNAKES ON THE LOOSE

Cobras escape and terrorise Chinese villagers

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Famous chalk horse may really have been canine

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Author who wrote of alien gods from Nibiru passes on

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JEN OGILVIE wonders what WikiLeaks means for the future of conspiracy theory...

GETTY IMAGES / AFP / LEON NEAL

So far, Julian Assange and WikiLeaks have been broadly supported by conspiracy theorists – support that the arrest of Assange and apparent pressure on WikiLeaks from the US government is likely to encourage. WikiLeaks has been applauded on conspiracy forums as a paragon of disclosure and a shining example to the cowardly US media: as one poster on rense.com put it: "The American media is a whore, whereas the courageous blood of warriors runs through WikiLeaks's veins."

But while many conspiracy theorists might support Assange, he has made clear his contempt for them, saying "Many weirdos email us about UFOs or how they discovered that they were the Antichrist while talking with their ex-wife at a garden party over a pot-plant." And this despite Assange sharing similar character traits (paranoia, self-righteousness, a conviction of his own unique intelligence, individual-against-the-system rhetoric)[5] and having as an ultimate goal the dissolution of all conspiracies.

This one-time hacker isn't simply a freedom-of-information activist, though: he wants to reorganise society and speaks of "radically shifting regime behaviour". And while identifying his primary targets as oppressive regimes such as those in China and Russia, he has also said that exposing secrets could "bring down many administrations that rely on concealing reality – including the US administration". Many commentators have argued that the material Assange has chosen to leak reveals, in fact, an openly anti-US agenda.

Where Assange differs from many other conspiracy theorists is in seeing the operation of the state – any state – as being, by definition, a conspiracy against its subjects: states, along with big business, constitute conspiratorial institutional hierarchies, or "patronage networks". Laying out his philosophy in two 2006 tracts, "Conspiracy as Governance" and "State and Terrorist Conspiracies", Assange wrote: "Authoritarian regimes give rise to forces which oppose them by

continued on page 6

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Climbers in danger of falling

Wolverhampton Express & Star, 27 July 2010.

Inverness sunk by Cod Army

Sunday Post, 25 July 2010.

England cricketer blames cat for drink-drive arrest

Independent, 17 Aug 2010.

Transvestite had sex with a dog at English Heritage castle

D.Telegraph, 21 July 2010.

Pervert loses his appeal

Wolverhampton Express & Star, 30 July 2010.

NEWS Ghouls turn up at Moat funeral

Metro, 3 Aug 2010.

Albino python on cocaine confronts police

ABC News, 12 Aug 2010.

Men and women are from the same planet

D.Mail, 16 Aug 2010.

Russian man jailed for assaulting fortune teller who predicted he would go to jail

BNO News, 9 Aug 2010.

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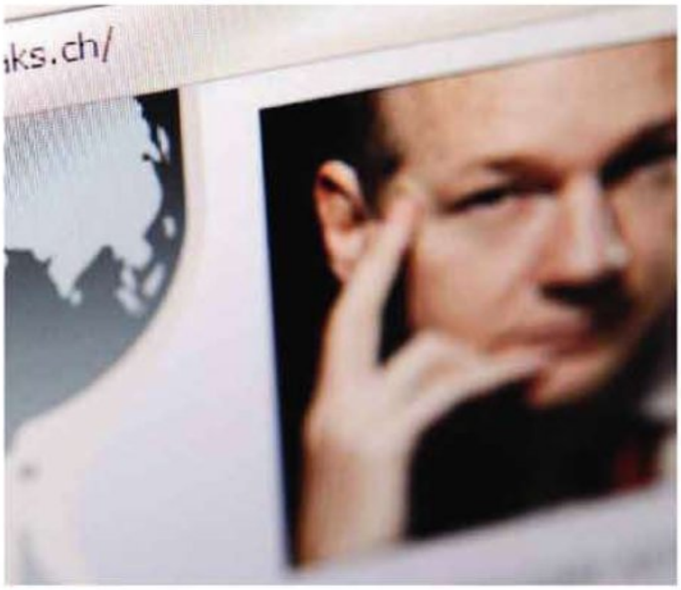


GETTY IMAGES / AFP / COFFRINI

Is secrecy desirable, and if so, is it possible?

pushing against the individual and collective will to freedom, truth and self-realisation. Plans which assist authoritarian rule, once discovered, induce resistance. Hence these plans are concealed by successful authoritarian powers. This is enough to define their behaviour as conspiratorial." He explains such conspiracies as being predicated on the communication links between members; disrupt these links, he says, and you will induce fear and paranoia, forcing the organisation to turn in on itself, making communication less effective – meaning it is less able to think or conspire and thus hold on to power. "If total conspiratorial power is zero, there is no information flow between the conspirators and hence no conspiracy." Secretive and unjust organisations are to be made *more* secretive and unjust in order that they might implode: "When we look at an authoritarian conspiracy as a whole, we see a system of interacting organs, a beast with arteries and veins whose blood may be thickened and slowed until it falls, stupefied; unable to sufficiently comprehend and control the forces in its environment."

Like many anarchists, Assange has been less forthcoming about exactly what would replace the current system. His idea seems to be of a collection of individuals, each free to experience emotions and enjoy full self-actualisation.[6] Ironically, it would seem that this most tech-savvy and plugged-in of men would like this to happen in a rural idyll. As he wrote on his personal website, iq.org: "I'd take a deep book, a backpack of food and a tent and go walking for three months along the .au or .nz coast… The natural environment provides man with ready motivational gradients, but civilization has filled them in. Hyper-civilized influences, such as computing, artificial lights, drugs, films, instant food supply, telephones and reading decalibrate by disconnecting behaviour and reward and failing to provide the sense data that our biological mental and physical structures have evolved to require."

The contradictions of Assange's position have not gone unremarked. His own organisation is highly secretive and depends on encrypted channels of communication between individuals. The lack of transparency of WikiLeaks's own funding has also raised eyebrows, not least those of John Young, who set up document-leaking site Cryptome in 1996 and helped found WikiLeaks before leaving over concerns about its hubris, size, and the money it was seeking to raise (he is still broadly supportive of the site, despite remarks comparing it to a cult, government or spy organisation which were interpreted by the more conspiracy-minded as clear proof of WikiLeaks being a CIA-front).

WikiLeaks, one might argue, enjoys just the kind of power without accountability of which Assange is so critical. Assange has argued that the ends justify the means – that he and WikiLeaks members might get "blood on our hands" from publishing, for example, a document about electromagnetic devices used by soldiers to prevent IEDs from being triggered, but that the ultimate goal makes that a price worth paying. To some, this makes him as morally compromised as those he'd like to expose, and his own authoritarian style, control-freakery and grandstanding seem out of line with his ideological pronouncements and the ethos of the hacker community from which he emerged.

Even if Assange were to be silenced or WikiLeaks shut down, the genie is out of the bottle. Other document-hosting sites already exist, and more will spring up to take WikiLeaks's place. More widely, the ranks of those fighting for transparency are swelling: for instance, Peter Sunde (one of the founders of The Pirate Bay), is attempting to create a new root server to compete with ICANN, the system which controls the Internet's domain name system and can take down domains considered to be breaking the law; Iceland has passed the Icelandic Modern Media Initiative (IMMI), which seeks to create a legal safe haven for journalists by combining all the source-protection, freedom of information and transparency laws from around the world.

This is a war about secrecy in an Internet age: is secrecy desirable, and if so, is it possible? Who wins the war is of great moment to the conspiracy theorist. If the forces for concealment triumph, increasingly lurid conspiracies will flourish, even if hounded to the edges of the net. But Assange's focus is not on what is revealed so much as on the process of revealing; and if the movement for transparency comes out on top, the traditional conspiracy theorist may have to choose between joining in the practical fight for disclosure or clinging to pet theories in the face of mounting lack of evidence and becoming an irrelevance.

In that case, the Internet, commonly held to have been a boon to conspiracy theory, could become, in some senses, the agent of its collapse. The other possibility is that a growing avalanche of leaks eventually exposes the existence of some nefarious New World Order scheme to take over the world, proving the conspiracy theorists to have been right all along…

NOTES

[1] Wikipedia: "List of individuals banned from entering the United Kingdom".

[2] Cited at http://tinyurl.com/32dsq8b (informationclearinghouse.com).

[3] See for example http://tinyurl.com/2vjdw5l (cryptome.org).

[4] http://tinyurl.com/398kt3b (economist.com).

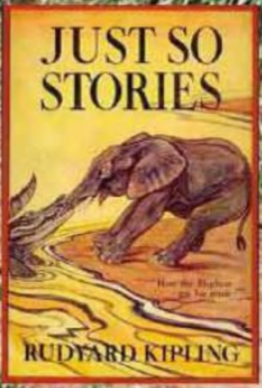
[5] iq.org: "When my eyes see phrases like 'right thing to do', 'appropriate' etc, I wonder what unstated world view I am meant to share. These phrases smell of that unusually putrid whip; social sanction. But every man has experienced social sanction as the direct manifestation of morons baying at the moon, nodding and calling the result *consensus*."

[6] iq.org: "Do not be concerned about when one is to do good, who defines good, etc. Act in the way you do because to do otherwise would [be] at odds with yourself. Being on a path true to your character carries with it a state of flow, where the thoughts about your next step come upon waking, unbidden, but welcome."

MOUSE MEAL

A doomed mouse takes a last look at the world before being consumed by a 4lb (1.8kg) African bullfrog in Mozambique. Known as the biting frog, it has razor-sharp teeth called odontoids that allow it to chew anything it can fit in its cavernous mouth – reptiles, birds, even poisonous snakes. These predators can jump an impressive 12ft (3.6m) to catch their prey. *Sun, D.Mirror, 3 Nov 2010.*

PHOTO: SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY / TOM McHUGH



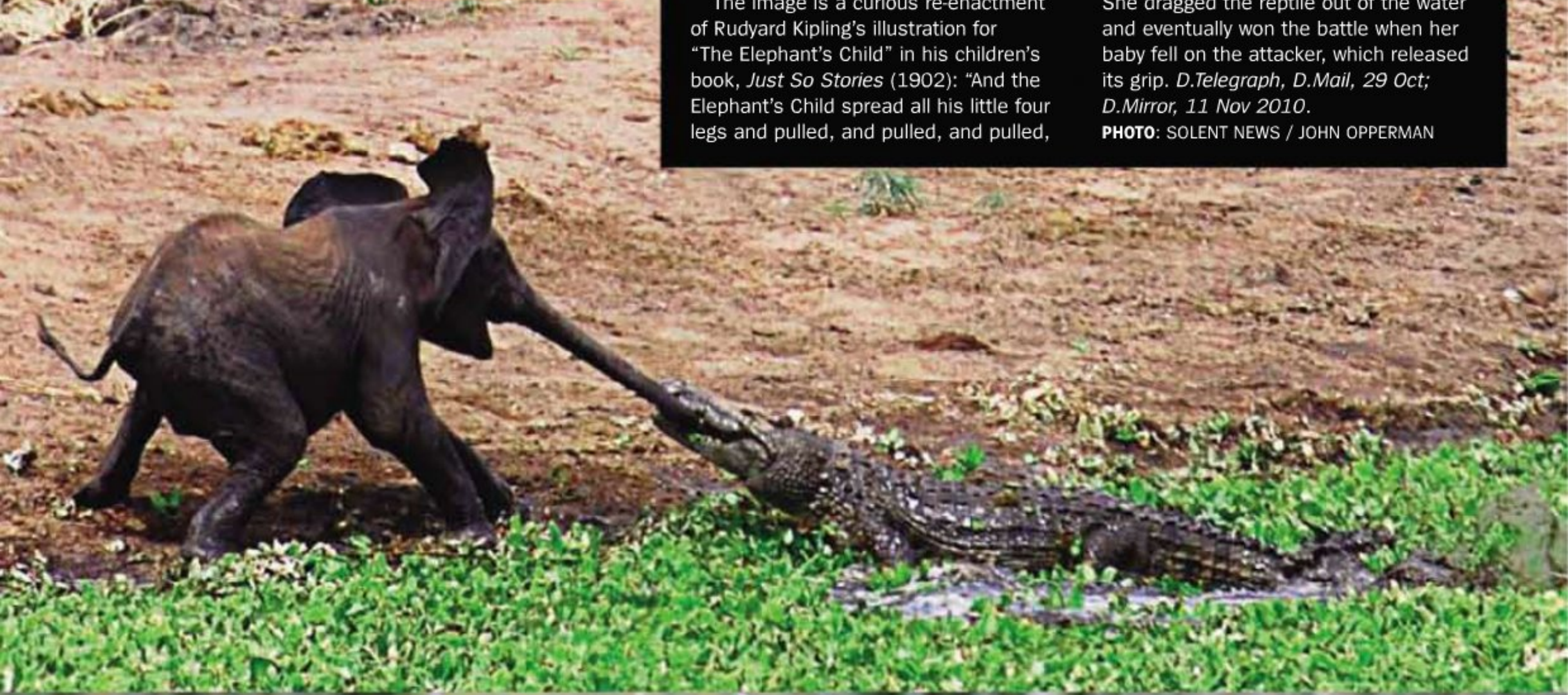
TUSK FORCE

A baby African bush elephant cries out in distress after a crocodile grabbed its trunk in Kruger National Park, South Africa, a scene captured by Johan Opperman, 38, of Pretoria. "The whole herd went crazy, running around, trumpeting, and stamping the ground," he said. This managed to scare off the reptile. "From a couple of experts I've heard that this is very rare, and that crocodiles don't normally try to catch elephants."

The image is a curious re-enactment of Rudyard Kipling's illustration for "The Elephant's Child" in his children's book, *Just So Stories* (1902): "And the Elephant's Child spread all his little four legs and pulled, and pulled, and pulled, and his nose kept on stretching; and the Crocodile thrashed his tail like an oar, and he pulled, and pulled, and pulled, and at each pull the Elephant's Child's nose grew longer and longer – and it hurt him..."

Though such attacks are said to be very rare, a similar scene was photographed recently by Martin Nyfeler in Zambia's South Luangwa National Park. A mother elephant and her baby were drinking at a water hole when a crocodile clamped its jaws on the mother's trunk. She dragged the reptile out of the water and eventually won the battle when her baby fell on the attacker, which released its grip. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 29 Oct; D.Mirror, 11 Nov 2010*.

PHOTO: SOLENT NEWS / JOHN OPPERMAN



SIDELINES...

CHICKEN HELL

Wildlife officials found 153 chickens in a man's bedroom in Cape Town, South Africa. They raided his home after neighbours complained of a disgusting smell. The man has "rescued" eggs from a poultry factory where he had worked and put them in his oven, but was "surprised" when they hatched. Many birds were seriously ill and had to be put down. *Sun, 14 Sept 2010.*

SNAIL SATNAV

Exasperated with snails ravaging her petunias and lettuce, but loath to kill them with pellets or salt, Ruth Brooks, 69, of Totnes in Devon, persuaded her neighbours to join her in marking snails with different coloured nail varnish before swapping them or dumping them on nearby wasteland. She found that snails have a homing instinct of up to 300ft (90m) – so gardeners should dump them at a greater distance. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 16 Sept 2010.*

BRIEF ENCOUNTER

For two hours, a green and yellow budgerigar became a member of the crew of *HMS Westminster* after it flew on board while sailors were taking part in a training exercise off Plymouth. It perched on a seaman's cap and was fed bread, nuts and water by the crew, who called it Bostie. Then the ship's general alarm bell sounded, Bostie dropped dead, and was given a burial at sea. *D.Telegraph, 19 Oct 2010.*

MARTIN ROSS

Extreme survivalists

Teenagers adrift, plus one old lady locked in the lavatory

COURTESY DOMINION POST / TAI FREDERICSEN

LEFT: The Atafu islanders just before rescue after being adrift for over 50 days.

On 5 October, three boys set off in an aluminium boat from Atafu, a small coral atoll in the Tokelau islands, a remote New Zealand territory. Tokelau is made up of three atolls – Atufu, Nukunonu and Fakaofo – and it was Atafu's turn to host sports competitions. Among the visitors was a girl from Fakaofo who captured the eye of one boy. When she sailed home, Etueni (or Edward) Nasau, 14, Filo Filo and Samuelu Peleha or Pelesa (aka Samuel Perez), both 15, mourned her departure. At about 2am, under a starry sky with a lot of alcohol, they decided to take the island's newest small boat and find true love 125 miles (200km) to the south. Polynesian folklore is rich in tales of lovers making epic voyages or swims. They had a couple of sacks of coconuts, some beer and a tank of fuel. If anybody saw them go, they did not think it unusual.

The boys soon lost their bearings and ran out of fuel. After two days at sea, the coconuts had been eaten and for the next 48 days they drifted about 800 miles (1,300km), surviving on raw fish and a seagull they managed to catch, and collecting rain and dew on a tarpaulin. They were assumed to be dead after unsuccessful searches by the New Zealand Air Force. A memorial service was held for them on Atafu, attended by 500 people.

The boys had to collect rain water and dew on a tarpaulin

Then on 24 November they were found north-east of Fiji by the crew of the *San Nikunau*, a tuna fishing boat. "We drew up next to them and asked if they needed any help," said the vessel's first mate, Tai Fredricsen. "Their reply was a very ecstatic 'Yes!' They've got a lot of gusto, a lot of mental spirit. Physically, they are very disturbing [to look at] but mentally they are very strong." They had had nothing to eat for almost two weeks and for the last two days had been drinking sea water, which can cause kidney failure and mental instability. They required treatment for severe sunburn and dehydration, and were taken to hospital in Suva, the Fijian capital. The rescue was made more miraculous because the *San Nikunau* was operating far from its normal fishing grounds, taking a shortcut as it headed home to New Zealand.

Tokelau has long been the best-kept secret of the Pacific. It is a Polynesian paradise insulated from the outside world – it has no airport and is two days' sailing from Samoa, 300 miles (480km) to the south. It got telephone lines in the 1990s and in the past five years has begun to receive free wireless broadband Internet, Sky TV and imported alcohol – bringing violence, poverty and binge drinking. *Metro, Irish Times, ABC News, (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 26 Nov; Sydney Morning Herald, Brisbane Courier-Mail, 27–28 Nov 2010.*

OH DEAR, WHAT CAN THE MATTER BE?

A 69-year-old woman was locked in her bathroom for three weeks. She survived on tap water after accidentally breaking the lock on 1 November. "She was at her wits' end," said a neighbour in the Paris suburb of Epinay-sous-Senart. "Her bathroom is on the second floor and has no window, so she couldn't call for help." She could do nothing except bang on the wall and the pipes. Neighbours thought the noise was DIY work and organised a petition to have it stopped.

The unnamed woman kept her spirits up by taking lots of showers and repeatedly brushing her teeth (well, what else was there to do?). Eventually, worried neighbours called the police on 20 November. "After knocking on the door and hearing nothing, we pressed our ears up against the door and made out a muffled noise," said a police spokesman. Firemen forced a window, smashed the bathroom door down, and found her lying on the floor. "The woman was very thin and weak-looking and was taken to hospital," said the spokesman. "She is a very popular lady but keeps herself to herself and people presumed she was away on holiday." *Metro, BBC News, 24 Nov 2010.*

Woods deadly for dogs

Just walking in wooded areas can bring on fatal attacks

BOTH PIX: SOLO SYNDICATION / DAMIEN McFADDEN

LEFT: The Young family with their West Highland terriers. **BELOW:** The dogs sickened but recovered after treatment.

A mystery illness that affected at least 18 dogs last year, killing four, returned in September. The pets are struck down after walking in woodland. Scores suffered vomiting, dehydration, lethargy, diarrhœa and breathing difficulties, and up to 30 died across the country in September and October.

After Nigel and Janette Young walked their dogs in Laughton Wood, near Scotter in Lincolnshire, the animals became restless and were scratching and licking their paws. The Youngs took them to the vet, who prescribed antibiotics, but their condition worsened overnight as their mouths locked shut and they became dangerously dehydrated. The West Highland terriers Kip, Sandy and Mona, all aged eight, and the dogs' mother Molly, 11, were taken to a vet's hospital and put on intravenous drips for four days before they were well enough to return home.

Other pet owners haven't been so lucky. Many dogs have died following walks in wooded areas in north Nottinghamshire, including Sherwood Forest, Clumber Park, Haywood Oaks, Blidworth Woods, Sherwood Pines and Thieves Wood. Others have fallen ill in Lincolnshire and after walks in the Queen's 20,000-acre (8,000ha) Sandringham Estate in Norfolk, where at least two died in 2009.

Up to 30 pets died in Britain in September and October

In 2009, Natural England carried out tests on samples taken from affected dogs, but found no trace of man-made poisons. One possible cause is a natural poison, such as fungi, but the dogs' owners didn't notice them eating anything unusual. Janice Dixon, a vet in Rainworth, Nottinghamshire, treated several dogs with "horrendous" diarrhœa and vomiting after walks in the Sherwood Forest area, but found no sign of fungi in their vomit or fæces. Ticks or mites were also ruled out: both Mrs Dixon and Natural England found no signs of the creatures on the dogs that died.

Ex-dog trainer Ryan O'Meara, who edits *K9* magazine, suggested cyanobacteria (blue-green algæ) might be to blame. Dogs don't need to drink infected water to be affected – merely walking in a boggy area and licking their paws will get the toxin in their systems. Small quantities – just 20 parts per billion – can be fatal. It is difficult to test for the microbes on live animals as samples are needed from the liver; the Environment Agency found blue-green algæ in some specimens, though other samples were clear. At the end of October, the Queen called in the Animal Health Trust charity to investigate conditions at Sandringham. At the time of writing, the mystery remains unresolved. The illness seems to vanish with the first frosts, so it should have gone by the time the Queen arrives with her corgis for her traditional Christmas visit to Sandringham. *D.Telegraph, 25 Sept; D.Mail, 23+29 Oct 2010.*

SIDELINES...

PHANTOM SKYDIVER

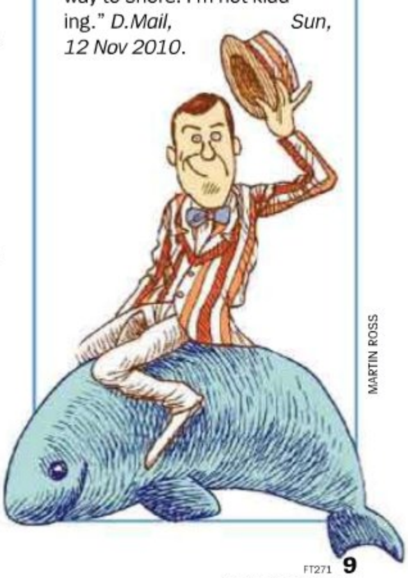
On 14 September, police in Egg Harbor Township in southern New Jersey received reports from three "credible witnesses" that a person wearing a jumpsuit had fallen from a plane without a parachute at about 3.20pm. An intensive ground and air search proved fruitless. There were no reports of missing skydivers or similar incidents from area airports. *Atlantic City Press, philly.com, 15 Sept 2010.*

BAG OF BOAS

A bag bursting with 95 live boa constrictors, along with other snakes and a turtle, broke open on a luggage conveyor belt at Kula Lumpur International airport in Malaysia on 26 August. Ken Liang "Anson" Wong, 52, on his way to Jakarta in Indonesia, was arrested and pleaded guilty to wildlife smuggling. He faces up to seven years in jail and a fine. *[AFP] 4 Sept 2010.*

PORPOISE RESCUE

The actor Dick Van Dyke, 84, claims he was once saved by a school of porpoises. He fell asleep on a surfboard at Virginia Beach and was out of sight of land when he woke up. "I started paddling with the swells," he said, "and then saw fins around me and I thought 'I'm dead!' But they turned out to be porpoises and they pushed me all the way to shore. I'm not kidding." *D.Mail, Sun, 12 Nov 2010.*



MARTIN ROSS

SIDELINES...

BOTTLED FROG

Isolde Beesley of Leicestershire claims a thumbnail-sized frog fell out as she poured a glass of Moscatel de Valencia, a white Spanish dessert wine bought at Asda. A spokesman for the shop said: "It's nigh-on impossible for any object to find its way into a bottle of wine when it is being produced." *D.Telegraph, 5 Oct 2010.*

SHOE MYSTERY

Workers restoring Gelli Iago, a 300-year-old ruined cottage in Nant Gwynant, Snowdonia, discovered about 100 single shoes under the hearth. The National Trust appealed to the public for possible explanations. *Sun, 25 Sept; Sunday Times, 26 Sept 2010.*

FANNIE FLASHER

A woman stripped naked in front of dozens of people having breakfast in the Cool Spot Café in Fannie Bay, Darwin, Australia, on 18 August. She took off all her clothes after she and another woman had a fistfight over a man. "That was just a shocker," said eyewitness Fernando Dentes. "People were trying to eat." *News.com.au, 19 Aug 2010.*

NO NEWS

On Good Friday 1930, in the view of news editors at the BBC, there was no news of the normal type or standard for broadcasting, so the announcer simply declared: "There is no news tonight." This hasn't happened since. *D.Mail, 21 Oct 2009.*

MARTIN ROSS

LONG STRANGE TRIP

LONG-LOST OBJECTS FIND THEIR WAY TO THE RIGHT RECIPIENT

ROSSPARRY.CO.UK

BUGLE BLAST

Retired engineer Maurice Green, 73, (above) couldn't resist buying a battered old bugle in Rotherham market, South Yorkshire, for a bargain £5. "I was in the Army in the 1950s and went into the local market to look for medals from battalions I had served alongside," he said. "I spotted this bugle on a bric-a-brac stall. It was as black as soot, but I noticed its Army service number had the same first three digits as my grandad's." When he took it home and cleaned it, he found that it was indeed the bugle that had belonged to his grandfather, Drummer Daniel Clay of the 8th Battalion York and Lancaster Regiment.

One of the family's treasured possessions is a letter written by the 26-year-old soldier to his mother the day before he was killed. It told of a "terrible bombardment" going on and predicted it would be "hell upon earth before we have finished". The next day, 1 July 1916, was the first day of the Battle of the Somme. Private Clay sounded the charge on his bugle as 703 men from his battalion leapt from their trenches. All but 68 men perished, including Pte Clay, whose body was never recovered amongst the 60,000 British casualties – the worst one-day combat losses in the history of the British Army.

Pte Clay left a six-year-old daughter, Harriet, whose mother had died in childbirth. Mr Green, Harriet's son, said: "It would have been nice if we had found the bugle while my mother was still alive." She always had a photograph of her father on display, and died in 1995 at the age of 85. Mr Green inherited his grandfather's medals, which had his service number, 13202 – the number on the bugle. It was played again on Remembrance Sunday 2010 when the Last Post sounded over Rotherham. It had probably been picked up on the battlefield by one of the few survivors on that terrible day. "I asked the stallholder where he bought it from and he said it came from a house clearance, but he couldn't remember when or where." *D.Mail, D.Mirror, 19 Nov 2010.*

An impulse buy in the market was his Grandfather's old army bugle

PA / AP / NICK SHULTZ

CAMERA'S TURTLE ENCOUNTER

A Dutchman who lost his camera while scuba-diving in the Caribbean got it back – after it washed up in Florida, 1,100 miles (1,770km) away. Coastguard Paul Shultz spotted the bright red Nikon camera pounding against the rocks of a marina in Key West, Miami. Inside the waterproof plastic case, the camera was almost pristine and Mr Shultz was able to view the photographs and video it contained. There were pictures of two men preparing to scuba dive, a school poster in Dutch, a family nestled together on a sofa – and a mysterious five-minute video of splashing water and what looked like a fin. Mr Shultz uploaded the images to Scubaboard.com, an online diving community. Within days, users identified the location as Aruba, a Dutch island off the Venezuelan coast. A plane's tail number was visible in one shot, and a computer search showed the aircraft was on the island on the day the photograph was taken.

Mr Shultz then posted the pictures on travel websites Cruisecritic and Aruba.com, and two days later a local woman contacted him to say she recognised the children in the photos as classmates of her son. The camera was soon back with owner Dick de Bruin, a Royal Dutch Navy sergeant, who had lost it seven months earlier, during an operation to salvage the anchor from the *USS Powell*, an American ship that protected Aruba during World War II. He had been stationed with his family in Aruba for the past three years. The video, which was put on YouTube, shows an encounter with a sea turtle that mistook the camera for a meal and inadvertently switched it on. The date is January 2010 – two months after the camera was lost. *[PA] Times, 15 June 2010.*

Chinese snake tales...

Cobras on the loose, plus a grateful pet saves family

CFP

ABOVE: Cai Young returns cobras to the hatchery from which they had escaped.
BELOW: Some of the young snakes after recapture.

Cai Yong thought it would be a good idea to buy 3,000 cobra eggs and hatch the snakes at an abandoned school building in homemade cages of plywood, brick and netting. The local businessman's plan to sell venom for traditional medicine fell apart when more than 160 of the serpents slithered through a hole in the wall, creating bedlam in a remote part of south-western China. From the beginning of September, cobras were spotted in outhouses, kitchens, front yards and the mah-jong parlour in the tiny village of Xianling in Qijiang county, Chongqing municipality. "I saw one in the bathroom," said Zhang Suli, 47, the wife of a corn and rice farmer. "I was scared, and I started screaming." Cobras can kill with a single bite.

The Mid-Autumn Festival holiday at the end of September, celebrating the harvest moon, was not auspicious for the people of Xiangling. Following the cobra story, which veered between slapstick and terror, there was an apparent government clampdown, in which officials claimed that most of the snakes had been captured and all was well, assertions that many local people did not believe. Guan Xinyu said local officials were more interested in damping down any sign of trouble than in rounding up snakes. He said that while the 1,500-plus cobras that didn't escape had been taken away, he had not seen anyone trying to catch the ones that lurked around the village. "The government says there aren't any cobras left, so why are people still seeing them?" asked Wei Yuanxiang. "The government just wants to get this matter finished." Mr Wei's neighbour, Luo Lizhong, said he saw a cobra darting across his toolshed several days after the village was given the all-clear. ***Sydney Morning Herald, 25–26 Sept 2010.***

"I saw one in the bathroom. I was scared and screamed"

A Chinese man who nursed a dying snake back to health claims it saved his family by raising the alarm when their house caught fire. Yu Feng, of Fushun, Liaoning province, found the dying black snake outside his home. "I treated it with herbal medicines and in 20 days it recovered," he told the *Liaosheng Evening Post*. He took the snake to a nearby mountain more than a mile away to release it back into the wild – but the next morning it was back at his house. "I set it free twice more, but it always came back," he said. "Neighbours said the snake had come back to repay my kindness, so I kept it." He named the snake Long Long and adopted it as a pet.

One night, Yu was asleep when he felt something cold on his face. "I opened my eyes and it was Long Long," he said. "He had never woken me up before but I was so tired I went back to sleep. But Long Long grabbed my clothes with his teeth and whipped the bed with his tail. Then he went to my mother's bed and whipped her bed with his tail. I woke up then and smelt something burning and saw my mother's electric blanket was on fire so I leapt up and turned it off." Reptile experts said snakes lack the intelligence to act in this way – but Yu believes Long Long acted out of gratitude, to repay him for saving its life. *Ananova, 4 Jan; New York Post, 5 Jan 2010.*

SIDELINES...

SAVED FROM TORNADO

Brandon Emiliano, aged seven months, was ripped from his cot in the middle of the night by a tornado as winds up to 72mph (116km/h) tore the tin roof off his home in Tamaulipas, Mexico. He was deposited unscathed on a dumped mattress 200ft (60m) away. His terrified mother found him after an hour, wrapped in a blanket in a nearby house. *Sun, 10 Sept 2010.*

FINAL SETTLEMENT

Germany cleared its World War I debt on 3 October 2010, when the last instalment – £59.5 million – of reparations imposed by the victorious allies was paid off, almost 92 years after the guns fell silent. The bill would have been settled earlier if payments hadn't been interrupted by the Third Reich and German partition (1933–90). This whole episode strikes the Gang of Fort as weirder than much of *FT*'s subject matter. *Irish Examiner, 29 Sept 2010.*

BOMBED BY BUDGIE

Jill Newman, 38, was strolling along in Lerwick, Shetland, enjoying a cone of chips and the sea air when she was hit on the head by a budgerigar. A seagull had dropped it in order to swoop on her chips. Mrs Newman said the tagged budgie "was very traumatised and shaking – but probably relieved not be seagull food." The bird is now living with a friend of hers in Aberdeen. *Metro, Sun, 14 Sept 2010.*

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

When a 67-year-old man returned to his flat in Nyköping, Sweden, last April, he found a large hole in the concrete wall between his flat and the next. His neighbour, 55, told police he had made the hole at the behest of the "media elite", who had controlled him for years. He spoke of a conspiracy called the "Consistory" and explained that he repeatedly went into the other man's flat to look for clues by watching the Crime Channel on his neighbour's TV. *The Local (Sweden), 18 Sept 2010.*

SIDELINES...

LUCKY STRIKE

At 1.13pm, or 13:13, on Friday the 13th August, 13-year-old Connor Laughlin was struck by lightning while sheltering from heavy rain at an air show in Lowestoft, Suffolk. The bolt hit his umbrella, flinging him to the ground, but he was saved by the rubber soles of his trainers, and escaped with a minor burn on his shoulder. "I didn't have a lucky number before," he said, "but I do now." *D.Mail, 14 Aug; News of the World, 15 Aug 2010.*

HAUNTED FACTORY

Workers at the Tetley Tea factory in Eaglescliffe, Co. Durham, the world's largest tea factory, claim it is haunted by a ghost who leaves half-drunk cuppas in the staff kitchen. It also turns on teabag-making machines. *Metro, Sun, 20 Aug 2010.*

MANHOLE COLLAPSE

Steve Poynton, 57, was baffled when his golden labrador Sam dropped his favourite ball on top of a manhole cover near his home in Bedhampton, Hampshire, and refused to take another step. After picking up the ball, Mr Poynton took a closer look at the lid and was stunned when the lightest touch of his toe caused it to disintegrate, leaving a dangerous jagged hole. Had Sam sensed danger? *The News (Portsmouth), 6 July 2010.*

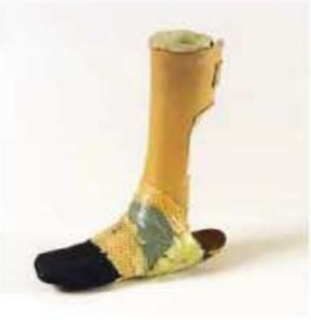
ORGANIC OR ELECTRONIC?

Responding to a report of a burglary in Seneca, South Carolina, on 8 November, police found Noah Smith, 31 (or 25), naked and lying face down in the doorway of the address. He attacked the police, who Tasered him without effect. He was then subdued and placed in shackles. He was believed to have consumed hallucinogenic mushrooms. An X-ray in hospital discovered a mouse up his rectum, according to UPI (10 Nov 2010). The *Sun* (12 Nov) said it was a computer mouse.

MUSEUM OF MELANCHOLY

A Croatian museum dedicated to failed liaisons is to have a permanent home in Zagreb after returning from a worldwide tour. The Museum of Broken Relationships displays exhibits donated by lovers who want to illustrate their bitter break-ups; these include an axe a distressed lesbian lover used to chop up an ex-girlfriend's furniture after she left for another woman, a broken-down yellow Vespa scooter one lover bought in the hope he and his ex would ride around on as if in a romantic Italian film, and a coffee machine that a woman gave away because it reminded her of an old flame who was more devoted to caffeine than he was to her.

The idea of the museum came to two Zagreb-based artists, Olinka Vistica and Drazen Grubisic, when they split up and wanted to do something creative with the vestiges of their relationship. Vistica said her impulse on breaking up with Grubisic after two years was the same as many people – to destroy, to be negative, to cut the arms off his jackets. "Instead we put all our objects together and then asked our friends to send us their mementos," she said. "The press got interested and people started donating items. Soon we had a trailer full of objects and the museum was born. The exhibition comes from a sincere, universal experience and helped us in our break-up process. I think the exhibits have a therapeutic effect for anyone else going through such emotional turmoil. The visitors fall into three categories, we find: people who are merely curious, people who are suffering themselves and seeking catharsis through a visit and a mixture of the two. It is the latter who usually end up donating things. I think I like the leg exhibit best: here was a man who lost part of his body, then part of his soul. It speaks to us all."



The false limb in question (above) was donated by a Zagreb man called Vladic, a veteran of the Croatian war of independence in the 1990s, whose leg was blown off by a landmine. Alongside the leg is a card which reads: "Zagreb, 1992: in a Zagreb hospital I met a beautiful, young and ambitious social worker from the Ministry of Defence. She helped me get certain materials which I as a war invalid needed for my false leg and our love was born. But the prosthetic limb endured longer than our love. It was made of better material!"

A pen on display tells visitors it was once used to write "romantic crap he didn't deserve". There is a pair of fluffy pink handcuffs "bought for some bedroom fun but which came to symbolise the chains with which he bound my soul", and a pathetic wedding dress donated by a Japanese woman who could no longer bear the pain of looking at it because it symbolised the hope and the failure of her doomed relationship. The artists also have a website where the broken-hearted can store SMS messages, photos and emails for anything from three months to four years, and if they choose, share their memories with the rest of the world. *Croatian Times, 11 Oct 2010.*

ALL PIX: MUSEUM OF BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

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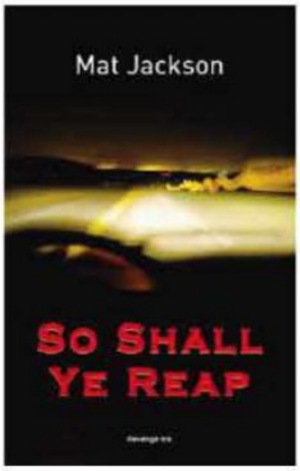

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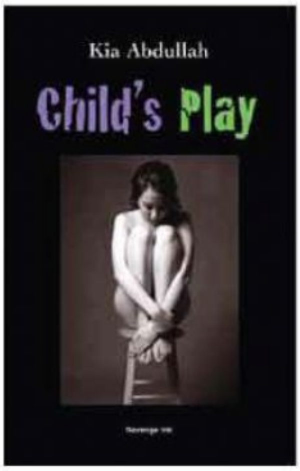

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MEDICAL BAG

TIME TO PRESCRIBE PRAYER?

Religious people have long extolled the power of prayer, but most scientists tend to doubt that it has any value beyond the power of suggestion or the placebo effect. **MARK GREENER** reports on studies that show otherwise.

GETTY IMAGES / AFP / JAY DIRECTO

Last September, a thought-provoking study appeared in the *Southern Medical Journal* (2010; 103:864–9). Researchers from Indiana University showed that proximal intercessory prayer (PIP) by evangelical Christians improved auditory and visual acuity in patients from rural Mozambique with poor hearing and sight. PIP's effects were greater than that produced by suggestion or hypnosis, which can also sharpen auditory and visual acuity.

PIP involves touch – such as an embrace or the placing of hands on the patient's head – and praying close to the patient. Praying or knowing someone cares enough to pray for you may make you feel better by enhancing well-being, optimism and confidence (*Medscape General Medicine* 2007; 9:56). So, PIP could trigger placebo responses – bolstering the body's innate ability to heal itself. But several studies now suggest that intercessory prayer (IP, or asking a higher power) speeds healing – even if patients don't know that they're the subject, if other people prayed from a distance or, most remarkably, prayed retrospectively. Not surprisingly, these results proved deeply controversial. IP doesn't just challenge established medical and scientific beliefs – it rips them to shreds!

The scientific study of IP began in 1988, when doctors in San Francisco split 393 patients admitted to a coronary care unit into two groups. The first group received no organised prayer. Christians outside the hospital prayed for the second group's recovery. When admitted, the two groups were equally ill. But the IP group developed less severe heart disease, were less likely to need mechanical help breathing, and consumed less medicine in the form of antibiotics and diuretics (*Southern Medical Journal* 1988; 81:826–829). Then, in 1999, researchers in Kansas City found that IP reduced heart disease severity by 11 per cent (*Archives of Internal Medicine* 159:2273–2278).

A year later, the *British Medical Journal* (2001; 323:1450–1) published even more startling results. In 2000, Leonard Leibovici (Rabin Medical Centre, Israel) randomly divided 3,393 patients who had had septicæmia between 1990 and 1996 into two groups. He arranged remote *retrospective* IP for one group. One in 50 fewer people died in the IP group (28.1 per cent mortality) than in the control group (30.2 per cent) – although Leibovici couldn't rule out that this was the play of chance. But the lengths of hospitalisation and fever were shorter in the IP group. Statistical analysis suggested these weren't chance findings.

Other studies tell a similar story. Patients left unconscious after severe head injury recovered better if they were the subject of IPs (*American Journal of Hospice and Palliative Care* 2009; 26-264-269). Another investigation examined bush babies (*Otolemur garnettii*), small African primates, which injured themselves (as in humans, a sign of distress). Self-inflicted wounds healed quicker in bush babies which were IP subjects compared to animals which were not. The IP group also showed improved blood quality – such as increased red blood cells and hæmoglobin – and more normal behaviours, such as time spent grooming (*Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine* 2006; 1242–8). This finding is important. Bush babies presumably don't have strongly held beliefs about religion and medicine that could contribute to the placebo effect and complicate human studies.

> **These results rip scientific beliefs to shreds**

Furthermore, other distance healing techniques – such as spiritual healing, noncontact therapeutic touch and external qigong – also seem to work. For example, in AIDS patients, distance healing reduced the likelihood of new AIDS-related illnesses (by 83 per cent), visits to doctors (by 30 per cent), hospitalisations (by 75 per cent), time spent in hospital (by 85 per cent) and illness severity – while improving mood (*Western Journal of Medicine* 1998; 169:356–363). In 2000, researchers (*Annals of Internal Medicine* 132:903–910) examined 23 trials involving 2,774 patients; 13 studies suggested that various types of distance healing worked.

You could argue that benefits in one, even two, studies are flukes. But as several – although not all – studies show similar results, the findings are harder to dismiss. An authoritative review by the Cochrane Collaboration (which usually assesses medicines, surgical techniques and so on) looked at 10 studies of IP. So, if IP is ineffective you'd expect clear evidence to emerge. Yet the authors commented: "The evidence does not support a recommendation either in favour or against the use of intercessory prayer." Critically, they add that the lack of "clear effects does not mean that intercessory prayer does not work".

In other words, we can't unequivocally claim distance healing works; but equally, *there's no compelling evidence that distance healing does not work* – and that's remarkable. And discrepancies between studies are understandable. Perhaps the study designs are more appropriate for investigating new medicines than distance healing. The Cochrane Review notes that problems with the IP studies' designs "are enough to hide a real beneficial effect". Perhaps distance healing works only for certain healers (prayers) and patients. After all, prayer is intensely personal. Perhaps different techniques have different effects. Perhaps distance healing works in only some medical situations – boosting the immune system so people recover more quickly, but not regenerating amputated limbs. But if further investigations show distance healing has an effect – however small in however few studies – it's hard to overstate just how radically the results will revolutionise our understanding of the Universe.

For more on Prayer Power, see **FT131:16**; **212:11**.

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MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE concludes his survey of British ghosts associated with the gallows.

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ABOVE LEFT: Protests at the 1953 execution of Derek Bentley following the shooting of PC Sidney Miles by Christopher Craig, who was too young to be hanged. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Bentley, alleged to have haunted his Croydon home. **BELOW:** Hangman John Ellis, whose ghost has been reported at Strangeways Prison.

THEREBY HANGS A TALE... PART TWO

The spirit of Derek Bentley, executed in January 1953, reportedly came back to haunt his bedroom in his family home years after his death. Along with the hanging of Ruth Ellis (see **FT270:16–17**), the execution of Derek Bentley sparked widespread protest and was considered a miscarriage of justice, both at the time and for decades afterwards. It inspired three books devoted to the case and a 1991 film with Bentley played by Christopher Eccleston. Bentley was a retarded 19-year-old with a mental age of 11 who was jointly convicted with his co-accused, 16-year-old Christopher Craig, of the murder of PC Sidney Miles. The policeman was shot dead with a handgun carried by Craig as the youths attempted to rob a Croydon warehouse. Bentley was actually under arrest at the time Craig fired the fatal shot, but Bentley had allegedly shouted, “Let him have it Chris!” before the policeman was killed. In court, these words (which were disputed at the time and since) were held to have been an incitement to Craig. Because of his age, Craig was too young to hang, but Bentley was old enough to be sent to the gallows, despite many petitions to the Home Secretary for clemency. Following the execution, the Bentley family led a long campaign to overturn his conviction. They left his bedroom at their Croydon home untouched, and believed they had heard his footsteps and found bedclothes mysteriously disturbed. Bentley’s pet dog “howled and seemed to recognise its dead master… years after the youth was hanged” and allegedly Bentley’s ghost was later seen in the house (*Sources:* Peter Underwood: *Haunted London, 1973*; Jack Hallam: *The Ghosts’ Who’s Who*, 1977). Derek Bentley’s murder conviction was finally quashed by the Court of Appeal in 1998, with Lord Bingham, the Lord Chief Justice, commenting that he had been denied “that fair trial which is the birthright of every British citizen”.

Hangman John Ellis is alleged to haunt the former condemned block

ALAMY / MIRRORPIX / TRINITY MIRROR

Beyond these examples, relatively few people put to death by the state have been claimed as returning to haunt the living. Scotland Yard’s ‘Black Museum’ of relics and exhibits from famous crimes and capital cases (now re-named ‘the Crime Museum’) was reputedly haunted, but I suspect some of the stories were invented by ghost story writer R Thurston Hopkins (1881–1958). 23 November 2010 marked the 100th anniversary of the execution of Hawley Harvey Crippen (often erroneously known as Dr Crippen), and the story circulates that his ghost haunts Pentonville Prison where he was hanged and interred for the murder of his wife. It is claimed a “bespectacled, sorrowful figure has apparently been witnessed standing over his unmarked grave, complete with a bent, crooked neck”.

An improbable tale also had Crippen’s spirit supposedly returning for a few nights after his death to waste ground near his home at Hilldrop Crescent in London, including in the form of a dog. *Sunday Mercury (Birmingham), 17 July 2009;* Peter Underwood: *Haunted London*, 1973.

Phantom hangmen have been claimed at a handful of locations. In August 2002, I was told that the former home of a hangman who lived at Royston in Hertfordshire was haunted, but details were sparse. John Ellis, who was hangman between 1901 and 1924, is alleged to haunt B-wing outside the former condemned block at Strangeways Prison. Staff have allegedly seen a mysterious man in a dark suit carrying a small briefcase who vanishes just before reaching the old iron staircase. Ellis is also proposed as the candidate for an invisible presence haunting a florist shop in Rochdale, pushing owner Susan Cotton on the shoulder several times and pinching her bottom. In life, Ellis ran a barber’s shop from the same premises. He committed suicide in 1932, allegedly having never recovered from distressing scenes at the execution of Mrs Edith Thompson in 1923. *Rochdale Observer, 8 Jan 2008*.

Another hangman with paranormal associations was James Berry (1851–1913), who served as executioner between 1884 and 1891. He succumbed to alcoholism and on

GETTY IMAGES / TOPICAL PRESS AGENCY

ABOVE: James Berry, the suidicidal hangman who saw the light during the Welsh revival of 1904.

13 February 1904 set off to kill himself. However, waiting at a railway station, he came across a newspaper report of mysterious lights appearing during a religious revival at Barmouth, Wales. Falling into conversation with a stranger, who turned out to be an evangelical Christian, Berry underwent a conversion experience and became a preacher. The lights in the report were the famous and still unexplained Barmouth lights seen near Egryn Chapel between 1904–05. (See Stewart P Evans: *Executioner. The Chronicles of James Berry, Victorian Hangman*, 2004; Paul Devereux: *Earthlights Revelation*, 1989.)

Some paranormal connections may be made with abolitionists opposed to capital punishment. Charles Dickens campaigned for restrictions on the use of the death penalty and is reputed to return to sites such as Rochester in Kent and Doughty Street in London. The wealthy eccentric Mrs Violet Van Der Elst, who spent large sums of her money in anti-hanging campaigns, was a spiritualist and held séances at her haunted mansion, Harlaxton Manor, Lincolnshire. Although an opponent of capital punishment, she favoured corporal punishment, according to the late Dennis Bardens (1911–2004, obit. **FT201:26**), who told me of his extraordinary visit to interview her for the *Daily Express* in the 1930s. He discovered her engaging in a sado-masochistic relationship with an Anglo-Indian servant who acted as her secretary. Their interview on ghosts and spiritualism was interrupted by angry and excitable outbursts when Mrs Van Der Elst got up to chase and strike her chubby servant with a cane, apparently not to his complete displeasure or personal objection. The late Arthur Koestler (1905–1983) wrote the anti-hanging tract *Reflections on Hanging* in 1956 and in 1961 published *Hanged by the Neck* with CH Rolph. In later years, his mind turned to synchronicity and psychic phenomena, and under the terms of his will, he posthumously endowed what in 1985 became the Koestler Chair of Parapsychology at Edinburgh University (**FT201:32–39**; **224:58–59**; **226:76**; **227:74**).

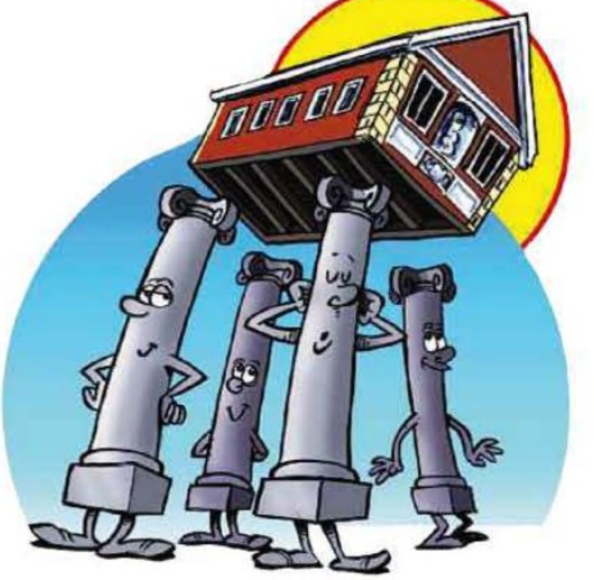
Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

137. WREN'S REDUNDANT COLUMNS

The myth

When Sir Christopher Wren was designing the Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford, he envisaged an unsupported ceiling. His patrons, convinced that such a structure would collapse, insisted that he insert some columns. He reluctantly agreed – but years later, maintenance workers discovered that the columns stopped a few inches short of the ceiling. Wren had secretly ensured his posthumous vindication.


HUNT EMERSON

The "truth"

There are no columns of any kind in the Sheldonian – so that seems to be the end of that. However, this story is also attached to various other Wren buildings, most notably Windsor Town Hall (aka Windsor Guildhall), a project which Wren saw to completion after its original architect had died. It's true that Windsor does have four non-supporting columns, but no one has ever managed to find any evidence at all of them causing a dispute between Wren and his employers. One theory is that they started out as supporting columns, but have settled over the centuries, leaving an unintended gap; another is that they are purely decorative.

Sources

http://s.coop/bbc; http://s.coop/bshm; http://s.coop/guildhall; http://s.coop/windsor; http://s.coop/bbcberkshire.

Disclaimer

The same basic story is also told about Brunel and the Maidenhead Bridge, Brunelleschi and Florence Cathedral, and the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Are any of the versions true? If you can make any of them stand up without scaffolding, please don your hard hat and reflective jacket and report to the letters page.

Mythchaser

A reader wants to know whether there are any first-hand (rather than FOAF-hand) accounts of what is sometimes called "Party Levitation". Popular with past generations of teenagers, this trick involved a number of people lifting another into the air, using only their little fingers and the amazing power of a magical incantation. Have you ever done it? And if so, do you know how? Failing that, can anyone give us a history of this curious pastime?

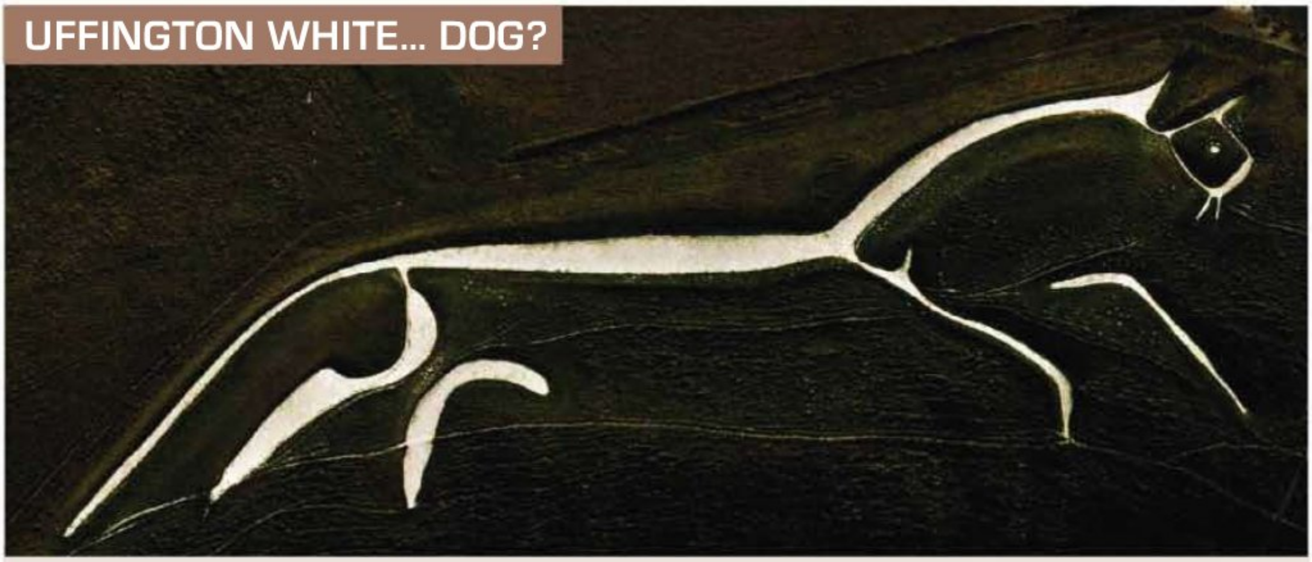
FOR MORE MYTHCONCEPTIONS, GO TO:
www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/mythbusters

MATT PATTINSON

ARCHÆOLOGY

PAUL SIEVEKING reports on alternative interpretations of Britain's oldest hill figure, a prehistoric door from Switzerland, and the veneration of "thunderstones".

UFFINGTON WHITE... DOG?



GETTY IMAGES / NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC / JAMES P BLAIR

Retired vet Olaf Swarbrick has written to the *Veterinary Record* to suggest that the celebrated Uffington White Horse carved into an Oxfordshire hillside is actually a dog. "Looking at it again, it seems that it is not a horse at all: the tail and head are wrong for a horse and more suggestive of a dog. It appears more like a large hound at full stretch. I thought it may be a greyhound, but an anthropologist suggests it is a wolfhound, which, assuming it is not a horse, makes more sense." He joked that it should be renamed the Wolfhound of Uffington. He also invited other theories about the figure. A previous suggestion is that the chalk figure resembles a cat, perhaps the ancestor of the large black cats sighted all over the country in the present age. Others have seen it as a dragon; the flat-topped hill in the valley just below is called Dragon Hill. It was here that St George was said to have killed the dragon, and where its blood spilled there is a bare patch where nothing will grow.

Keith Blacksall, from the National Trust, takes the conventional view: "What you have to remember is it's a stylised horse, almost like a stencil on the hillside so it's not a complete figure of a horse, it's a suggestion," he said. "I would like to think it's frozen in perpetual canter across the downs." It certainly resembles the figures identified as horses which are depicted on Celtic coinage, created with crescent- and lozenge-shaped die punches.

The first documentary reference to the 361ft (110m)-long figure is in a vellum scroll dating from 1072 to 1084, which refers to "mons albi equi" (White Horse Hill) at Uffington. The antiquarian John Aubrey (1626–97) suggested that the figure was made by Hengist, leader of the Anglo-Saxon invaders, because he bore a white horse on his arms or standard. In 1738, the Rev. Francis Wise claimed King Alfred (who was born at nearby Wantage) had cut the figure to celebrate his victory over the Danes at Ethandun in AD 871. Or was it King Arthur's "milk-white mare"? However, in 1995 the new technique of optical stimulated luminescence (which measures the time lapse since a given area of soil was last exposed to sunlight) indicated that the figure dates from the Bronze Age, maybe as early as 1400 BC, making it by far the earliest hill figure in Britain. *BBC News, D.Telegraph, 13 Oct 2010; Westwood & Simpson's "Lore of the Land" (2005).*

STONE AGE DOOR

Archæologists in Zurich have unearthed a 5,000-year-old door that may be one of the oldest ever found in Europe. The ancient poplar wood door, 153cm (5ft) high and 88cm (35in) wide, is "solid and elegant" with well-preserved hinges and a "remarkable" design for holding the boards together, said archæologist Niels Bleicher. Tree ring dating has shown that it could have been made in 3063 BC, just as the building of Stonehenge began. Harsh climatic conditions at the time meant people had to build solid wood houses to keep out the cold wind blowing across Lake Zurich.

PA PHOTOS / AP

The door was part of a settlement of so-called "stilt houses" frequently found near lakes about 1,000 years after agriculture and animal husbandry were first introduced to the pre-Alpine region. It is similar to a door found in nearby Pfaeffikon, while a third door – found in the 19th century and made from one solid piece of wood – is believed to be even older, possibly dating back to 3700 BC. The latest find was discovered at the dig for a new underground car park for Zurich's opera house. Archæologists have found traces of at least five Neolithic villages believed to have existed at the site between 3700 and 2500 BC. The door will be exhibited after chemical treatment to prevent rotting. *[AP] 20 Oct 2010.*

THUNDERSTONE MYSTERY

In 2005, archæologists Olle Hemdorff and Eva Thäte investigated a grave at Avaldsnes in Karmoy, southwestern Norway, reckoned to be from the late Iron Age (AD 600 to 1000). Brick and porcelain fragments from younger layers of soil showed it had been plundered. However, they found a greenstone axe from more than a thousand years earlier in the same layer of soil as seven glass pearls typical of the period.

During the last three years, several Stone Age artefacts – flints, flint fragments, quartz axes, etc – have been found in much younger burial mounds. "Unfortunately this documentation did not begin until the 1970s," said

Thäte. "Up to that date neither archæologists nor grave robbers were aware of these objects. They were just seen as unimportant and without archæological value." Only now has a clear pattern emerged from the data. Thäte mentioned a good example from Sogndal in Sogn og Fjordane, where a stone axe was found in an undisturbed stone coffin from the fifth century AD. And a burial site from Halland, Sweden, has almost 100 late Iron Age graves, nearly all containing flint objects.

"People probably considered old objects as a heritage from their ancestors," said Thäte. "Recycling old burial mounds for new graves is an indication of this relationship. The idea was that the mounds were memories from a distant past, and written sources indicate that recycling of mounds had a double function. Apart from providing a grave for the dead, they also legitimised property rights. People asserted their control over an area by burying their family in a gravesite belonging to their ancestors."

The archæologists think the axe was deposited in the Avaldsnes grave as part of the burial ritual. "People believed that lightning created thunderstones and that individuals who owned such stones would not be hit by lightning," said Hemdorff. The idea that lightning causes stones to fall from the sky is known from all over the world. It is certainly found in ancient Roman times, with regard to meteorites, stone axes and fossilised sea urchins.

The idea of Thor throwing his hammer when lightning strikes was found across Northern Europe right up to the 19th century. "Thor's mission was to protect gods and people against evil and chaos and it was therefore believed that Thor's rocks protected houses and people," said Hemdorff. "Two things seem to be important when choosing thunderstones: the form had to be similar to an axe or hammer, or the stone had to have 'flaming' properties, which flint and quartz have." Thäte added: "Both the form of the axe and the flints to make fire may be associated with fertility. Thor's hammer is clearly linked to fertility and prosperity. The hammer is a phallus fertilising the soil, which gives it an apotropaic quality, that is, the ability to protect against evil and accidents."

Returning to the axe in the plundered grave at Avaldsnes and why it was there, Hemdorff said: "If you consider how widespread the idea of thunderstones was all the way up to the 19th century, and how common superstition was, it is not unlikely that the grave robbers left a protective amulet to make up for their misdeed. After all, they opened a grave and committed sacrilege. Maybe they hoped that the axe provided protection against the spirit of the dead and their ghosts." *Science Daily, 16 June 2010.*

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

133. GET STUFFED

Or, The Mummy Returns – addenda to my previous embalmy army piece [**FT162:19**], itself supplementing **FT159:45**.

Embalming is associated with Egypt, thanks (mummies apart) to Herodotus's lurid account (*Histories*, bk2 chs85–7), especially the morticians' proclivity for necrophiliac sex with female cadavers, a detail worthy of Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved One.*

Thanks to his Egyptian staff, Joseph had father Jacob embalmed, likewise himself and eleven brothers (Genesis 50.2–3, 25–6; Acts 7.16) – Jewdicious biculturalism.

Herodotus (1.196; 3.24) attributes the practice to Babylonians and Ethiopians – *esprit de corpse* obviously widespread in the ancient East.

Various passages in Homer (e.g. *Iliad*, bk7 vv84–6; bk16 vv.456–7; bk18 vv350–3; bk19 vv37–9; *Odyssey*, bk224 vv67–8) may imply embalming, though not always easy to distinguish between this and pre-cremation unguenting; cf. R Garland, "*Geras Thanonton*: an Investigation into the claims of the Homeric Dead," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 28 (1981), p73 n35. Such corporeal preparation is widely attested, not least in Gospel accounts of Christ's obsequies.

Bodies were similarly treated to preserve them for long journeys to final resting places. Spartan kings Agesilaus and Agesipolis were coated respectively in wax and honey (Nepos, *Agesilaus*, ch8 para7; Plutarch, *Agesilaus*, ch40 para3; Xenophon, *Hellenika*, bk5 ch3 para19). The various sources for Alexander the Great don't all mention the honey, but Quintus Curtius's biography (bk10 ch10 paras9–13) says he was "perfumed in the Egyptian manner", and sent for burial to Alexandria, where Augustus (Suetonius's *Life*, ch18 para1) saw the mummy before it vanished to make the Shakespearean (*Hamlet*, act5 sc1 vv224–5) reflection "Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till he find it stopping a bunghole?"

Greek and Roman writers frequently ridicule embalming, Lucretius (*On the Nature of Things*, bk3 vv888–93) from the philosopher's view, Varro (*Satires*, fr81) from the comedian's. Cicero (*Tusculan Disputations*, bk1 ch45 para108) calls it "an error of nations". Dio Cassius (*Roman History*, bk50 ch24 para26) has Octavian mock this "Egyptian idiocy" in a pre-Actium speech, ironically balanced by his later account (bk51 ch11 para15) of Cleopatra embalming Antony, the first Roman so prepared for eternity.

Lucian (*Funerals*, para21) provides the gothic tale (supposedly autoptic) of an Egyptian who placed a mummy at his dinner table, a scene re-created in Peter Fonda's motorbike picture *The Wild Angels*.

Pliny expatiates on the preservative power of honey (*Natural History*, bk22 ch50 para108). The poet Statius (*Silvæ*, bk5 no1 vv225–31) describes the embalming of his wife Priscilla by Domitian's courtier Abascantus. Nero typically provides the most spectacular example. Having kicked his pregnant wife Poppæa to death, he atoned by (Tacitus, *Annals*, bk16 ch6) "having her not cremated Roman-fashion but stuffed with spices and embalmed like a foreign potentate"; cf. Derek Couts, 'The Nature and Function of Embalming in Rome,' *Classical Antiquity* 15 (1996), pp189–202.

Not much Byzantine evidence, although Corippus's poem *In Praise of Justin II* (bk3 vv20–5) vouchsafes the embalming of Justinian (AD 565), while the famous "sweet odours" emanating from the uncorrupted corpse of Saint Demetrius of Thessalonica hint at chemical preservation.

Archæological evidence bolsters the literary record. A young woman's mummified body was discovered (1445) in an Appian Way sarcophagus; R Lanciani (*Pagan and Christian Rome*, Cambridge, 1892, p296) said it attracted "swarms of bees". 1964 saw the discovery in (suitably) the so-called 'Tomb of Nero' of a seven-year-old girl datable to c. AD 150, while in 1962 (many electronic sites for these), the mummy of a middle-aged woman was found in a Thessalonican cemetery from c. AD 300. Most recently, again female from Thessalonica, a preserved body dating to c. 1700 BC: C Papageorgopolou & others, 'Indications of embalming in Roman Greece by physical, chemical and histiological analysis,' *Journal of Archæological Science* 36 (2010), pp35–42.

What goes around… The Mycenæan corpse Schliemann romantically thought was Agamemnon was preserved by a local pharmacist drenching it with gum arabic before shipment to Athens (Kathy Gere, *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism*, Chicago, 2009, p25). Schliemann's famous telegram to the King – "I have gazed upon the face of Agamemnon" – was actually a later re-write (David Traill, *Schliemann of Troy: Treasure and Deceit*, NY, 1995, p163).

Salty cognate Calypso finale provided by this 1953 Oxford theatrical satire:

Oh, you've all read in the New Testament
How the wife of Lot became a condiment.
It was her curiosity started the rot,
She only peeped a little but she had lost her Lot.

What a coincidence!

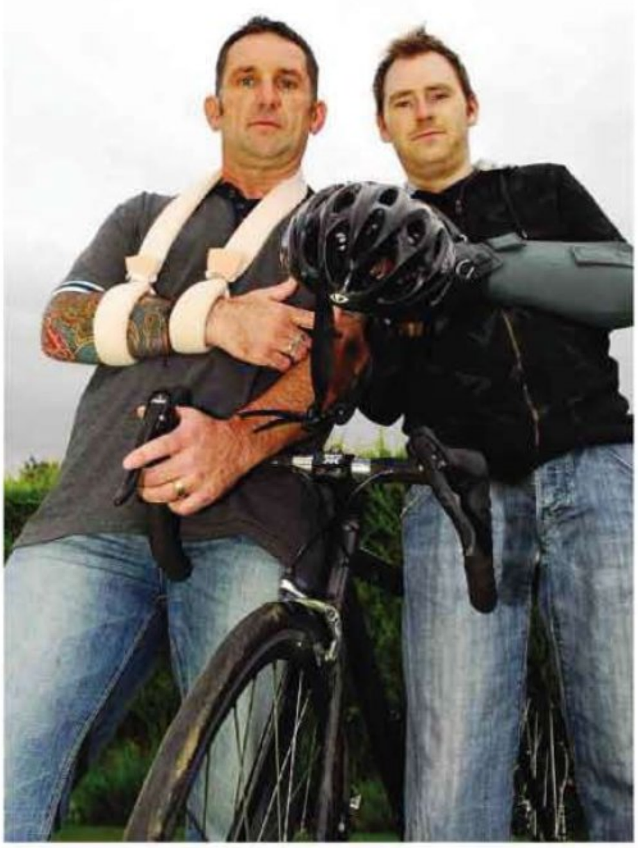
Similar accidents, identical lottery numbers and other unlikely events

Two cyclists in Scotland with the same name suffered identical injuries two days apart. Stewart Fairley, from Winchburgh, West Lothian, broke his collarbone after crashing off his bike at 37mph (60km/h) on a tight bend outside Falkirk. Then Stuart Fairley, from Dalgety Bay in Fife, broke his collarbone after landing on his head when a locked wheel flung him over the handlebars on a cycle path in Edinburgh. Both men were riding new bikes and neither had been in a serious accident before. Both agreed that without their helmets they probably would not have survived. They learned of each other's accidents through an online cycling forum. *Dunfermline Press, 23 Sept 2010.*

A former altar boy who became a priest in Australia bequeathed £56,700 to St Edburgha's Church in Yardley, West Midlands – the exact sum needed for spire repairs. Gilbert Roy, who died aged 62, was unaware of the work but left a sixth of his estate. The vicar and churchwarden said their prayers had been answered. *Times, 16 July 2010.*

Aiden Caldwell had a surprise when visiting the *RMS Titanic* exhibition in Melbourne. Visitors are given a "boarding pass" with the name of an original passenger picked at random, and he was given a pass in the name of Albert Caldwell, the name of his great-great-grandfather. The passenger was also travelling with his son, Alden Caldwell. There were more than 2,200 passengers, but only one family called Caldwell. *Sunday Mail (Queensland), 15 Aug 2010.*

The winning numbers in Israel's bi-weekly national lottery on 21 September were 13, 14, 26, 32, 33, and 36. Exactly the same numbers were drawn on 16 October. The lottery chairman called the outcome a "rare probability" and said the results were checked several times. *[AP] 17 Oct 2010.*



EDWARD MILTON

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26
14
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13
2

TOP: Stewart and Stuart Fairley, who suffered similar accidents just days apart.
ABOVE: Identical numbers on the Israeli national lottery – within a month.

Jennifer Allali, 39, gave birth to her son Sami at Eastbourne District General Hospital on 7 October, 10 days overdue. Her husband Driss Allali, an Arabic translator, said he was amazed his son was born on the same date as his five-year-old daughter, Najla, and son Adam, three. Inevitably, some handy 'expert' gave the odds of this happening: 48 million to one. All three siblings were originally due at different times, but all popped out overdue on the same date and were delivered naturally. *D.Mail, Sun, 14 Oct 2010.*

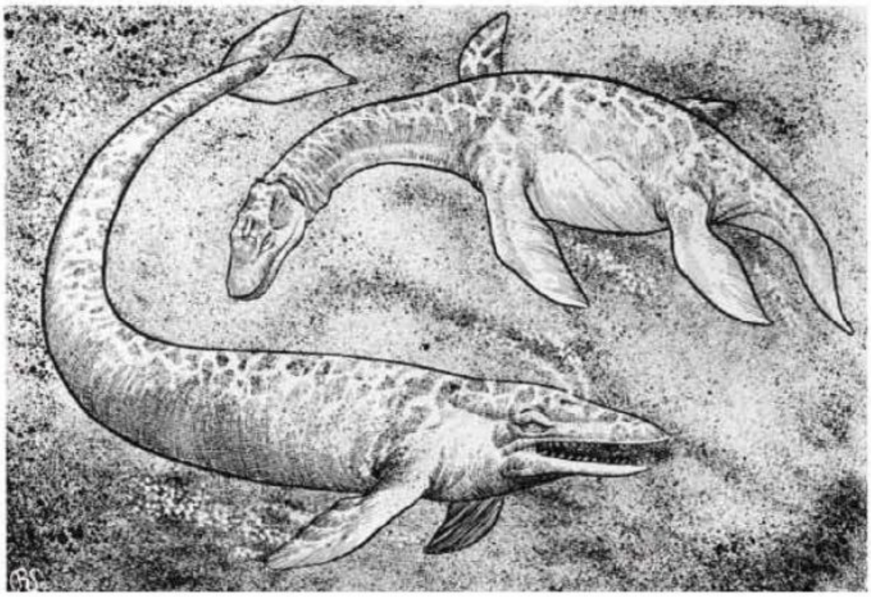
Andy Ashley, 48, from Nottingham, went into a museum in Bournemouth, Dorset, and watched a video of the town made 41 years ago – and saw himself in it. He was filmed by tourism officials holding a toy yacht during a holiday with his parents in 1969. "I couldn't believe it. What are the chances?" he said. *Sun, 24 Aug 2010.*

Barabara Soper, 36, from Rockford, Michigan, gave birth to her daughter Cearra Nicole on 10 October 2010 (10.10.10). This followed the birth of her son Cameron on 09.09.09 and her daughter Chloe on 08.08.08. Despite the neat pattern, Mrs Soper and her husband Chad insist it wasn't planned. The first child was born on the due date; the second was induced ahead of the 20 September due date; and the latest was induced after Mrs Soper developed blood clots in both legs. (The original due date was 4 November). All three were born at Spectrum in Grand Rapids, overseen by the same doctor. The Sopers say they are not tempted to aim for a fourth birth on 11 November 2011. *Fox 17, 11 Oct; Telegraph.co.uk, 15 Oct; D.Mail, 16 Oct 2010.*

Sisters Catherine Morris and Dawn Potts both gave birth to sons on 25 August at the University Hospital of North Staffordshire. Mrs Morris, 34, who went into labour first but gave birth second, was given the room reserved for her sister's cæsarean section. The sisters had been expecting their babies within four days of each other at the start of September. Mrs Potts, 31, from Stoke-on-Trent, had her cæsarean brought forward 11 days. On the same day, her sister was taken to hospital to have her labour induced after an antenatal appointment revealed she had a low-lying placenta. *D.Mail, 1 Sept 2010.*

ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the cryptozoological garden



FORTEAN PICTURE LIBRARY / RICHARD SVENSSON

DURRELL WILDLIFE CONSERVATION TRUST / FIDIMALALA BRUNO RALAINASOLO

ABOVE: Artist's impression of the Lake Champlain monster. **BELOW:** An aquatic mongoose reported in 2004 but recently confirmed from the island of Madagascar.

RETURN OF THE CHAMP?

Back in autumn 2010, I was delighted to receive from Sarah LaBrie of CrypticParanormal (www.crypticparanormal.com), a paranormal investigation team based in Virginia, firsthand details of two hitherto-undocumented multi-eyewitness sightings of a very large, unidentified aquatic creature in Lake Champlain. The first sighting occurred 10 years ago, when Sarah was aged 16. Flying back home from Guatemala to Vermont, USA, from a missionary trip with her old church, she and her fellow passengers were looking out of the plane as it flew low over the lake, coming in to land, when they saw a large sailing boat there – but that was not all. They also saw "a large dark shadow, about the size, if not larger than the sailboat, swimming under the boat. It was skinny on both ends and large in the middle."

Sarah's second sighting was much more recent – summer 2010: "I was walking with a friend of mine late at night, around 11pm or so. We were walking the edge of the waterfront when we suddenly heard a large splash… thinking a full grown adult [had] jumped into the water (which was strange since it was very cold out), we turned around to see what it was. We saw a large snake-like head, shiny, sticking above the water. It was larger than a football (the head). It was still for a moment, then began to swim (head still above water) fairly fast, we walked quickly to keep up with it. It stayed on the edge of the beach. Every once in a while the head would go under, followed by another enormous splash. Along with all of this, there was a VERY loud clicking noise… sounded like echolocation. We followed it for a good 10 or 20 minutes along the waterfront till finally with one last splash it went underwater and didn't resurface."

Was it the lake's mysterious crypto-denizen, Champ? Interestingly, back in 2003 a series of extremely loud, unexplained biosonar readings, similar to those emitted by a dolphin or beluga whale when seeking food underwater, was detected in Lake Champlain by a team from Fauna Communications Research while conducting sonar investigations there for a television show on Champ. *Sarah LaBrie, pers. comm., 30 Oct 2010.*

GOING BATTY OVER A MISSING MYSTERY

New Zealand correspondent Martin Phillipps recently contacted me, asking for help in tracing the source of a remarkable non-fiction account of a huge bat-like entity that he definitely remembers reading – but where?

"If I remember correctly, there were two men walking along some rough coastal cliffs (it may have been in Britain but I cannot be sure) when they came over a rise and saw a very large orange bat-like creature sunning itself on the rocks just above the water line. I believe they described it as being a good thirty or forty feet [9–12m] across but I just cannot find this story anywhere now and it is very frustrating. You know how it is when your mind gets stuck on one particular problem and you are unable to find the relevant information!"

Only too well! Sadly, however, as this story was new to me, I was unable to offer any suggestions, but if there is anyone out there who is familiar with it, we'd love to hear from you! *Martin Phillipps, pers. comm., 9 Oct 2010.*

A NEW MADAGASCAN MONGOOSE

As long ago as 2004, a mysterious form of mongoose had been photographed swimming in Madagascar's marsh-surrounded Lake Alaotra by workers from the Durrell Conservation Wildlife Trust, but it had been dismissed as a brown-tailed vontsira *Salanoia concolor* – a species already known from this island continent's eastern rainforests. In 2010, however, following morphological and molecular analyses of a male specimen that had died in a trap, a team of scientists from the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, London's Natural History Museum, Jersey's Nature Heritage, and Conservation International revealed that this speckled-brown, cat-sized creature (likened to a "scruffy little ferret") was a hitherto undocumented, distinct species. Accordingly, it has been fittingly christened Durrell's vontsira *Salanoia durrelli*, in honour of the celebrated conservationist and author Gerald Durrell. Cranial, dental, and paw modifications that distinguish it from its brown-tailed relative demonstrate adaptations to life in an aquatic environment. *http://tinyurl.com/2ffz7py (news.mongabay.com) 10 Oct; D.Telegraph, 11 Oct 2010.*

BLUE SPIDERS IN ESSEX!

And still they come! After two separate but equally anomalous blue spiders have come to light in West Yorkshire within the space of a year, I have now learnt of a comparable encounter in the south of England. On 9 November 2010, after having read my *FT* article on these oddly-hued arachnids, long-time *FT* reader Carl Schalck sent me the following exciting news:

"Just thought I should let you know that last summer we had a fair few blue and black spiders in our garage in Lewes, East Sussex. I thought they were a bit strange, but I had no idea they were that rare. I think there were three of them, very similar to common garden spiders but covered in blue and black patches. They lived on the inside of the garage door."

What makes this report even more interesting is that, judging from Carl's description, these spiders (unlike those from Yorkshire) do not appear to have been painted. This is because whereas even daubing a spider uniformly would not be an easy task, painting each of three spiders with a covering of blue and black spots would surely be nigh on impossible. And why on earth would anyone go to such an inordinate amount of trouble anyway? I already have on file records of confirmed colour mutation (though as yet not blue) in the common garden spider *Araneus diadematus*, so perhaps this trio represents a hitherto unreported mutant version. *Carl Schalck, pers. comm., 9 Nov 2010.*

ALLERGIC TO LIFE

Medical conditions produce intolerance to food, water, grass, sex, a menstruating girlfriend and even, in one case, your own baby...

A rise in allergic reactions of all kinds is probably due to an excessively hygienic environment in childhood in the last few decades. "What we really need to do is to breed a generation of dirty children who are exposed to germs," said Prof Jonathan Brostoff, emeritus professor of allergy and environmental health at King's College, London.

Borsi Batki (right), seven, a Hungarian girl living in Coventry, suffers from phenylketonuria, a rare metabolic disorder, and risks slowly poisoning her brain if she eats almost anything apart from fruit and vegetables. Her body can't process an amino acid found in most protein-rich foods. Most of her meals consist of a special pasta in tomato sauce and she has to drink a foul-tasting protein replacement supplement seven times a day. *Metro, Sun, 12 Oct 2010.*

Dan Hill, 32, quit his £80,000 a year job as an investment banker to become a carpenter, but working with wood brought him out in an itchy red rash and his eyes were always streaming. Tests showed he was allergic to wood dust. Dan, who was being taught by a carpenter in Bideford, Devon, wore a facemask, gloves and cream, but still suffered. Then he found he was not allergic to Welsh oak and set up a workshop in Mumbles, South Wales, making items from that wood. *Sun, 24 April 2008.*

After a decade of ill health, Father Clive Barrett of St Cross Church in Middleton, Leeds, discovered he had Coeliac disease, resulting in gluten intolerance – and was therefore allergic to communion wafers. His health improved when he had gluten-free blessed biscuits brought in especially for his church services. *Guardian, 20 May 2006.*

Protein
Fat
Dairy

CATERS NEWS AGENCY LTD / MATHE GROWCOOT

THE SUN

Tony Wass, 65, has run fishing trips from Girvan Harbour in Scotland for the last 25 years, but he becomes violently ill if he eats a tiny amount of seafood and breaks out in painful welts if he touches fish when his hands are dry. "I found I could handle fish as long as my hands were wet and I need to wash them off pretty quickly afterwards," he said. However, he's never been able to taste any of his catches. *Sunday Post, 22 Aug 2010.*

Shane Osborn, a two-star Michelin chef at the Pied a Terre in London's West End, developed a life-threatening allergy to fish about 10 years ago. The 33-year-old Australian had to wear surgical gloves to work with "anything that comes out of the sea". Even the smell of some fish cooking made his eyes water. At the time of the report in 2003, his allergy was extending to red wine, ceps (penny bun mushrooms) and aubergines. He had to keep EpiPens, emergency shots of adrenaline, in the kitchen in case his allergy triggered a severe reaction despite his precautions. *D.Telegraph, 19 Nov 2003.*

Yvonne is thought to be Britain's most allergic woman

Andy Laughton, 39, of Horsham, West Sussex, was forced to give up his job as a chef in a five-star hotel after discovering he has the rare condition aquagenic urticaria, meaning that water on his hands made them itchy and break out into hives. He tried wearing latex gloves – only to discover that he was also allergic to the lanoline and nickel used in their manufacture. The allergy affected only his hands and he could shower and get rained on as long as he kept his hands dry. *Metro, 27 Oct 2008.*

Heidi Falconer, 10, also suffered from aquagenic urticaria, but in a much more acute form. A single drop of water caused her skin to blister and even her own tears and sweat left her skin cracked and sore. To stay alive, she drank small amounts of orange juice or milk, and ate dry food like chicken and biscuits. *Sunday Express, 31 Aug 1997.*

Sandra Wood, 27, had to give up her job as a hairdresser because she had developed an extreme allergy to metal (such as scissors), which brought her out in blisters. She wore gloves to drive, avoided buses and trains and had to replace her cutlery with plastic. Metal pots and pans were banished from her kitchen in Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire. She first experienced the severe allergic reaction two years earlier while working in a pub kitchen full of stainless steel utensils. *D.Express, 24 Sept 1998.*

Yvonne Simon (left), 33, of Purfleet in Essex, is thought to be the most allergic woman in Britain. She began getting allergic reactions when she was eight, and as she grew up the reactions got worse. Any number of things make her glands swell and brings her out in a rash. Tests revealed her to be allergic to deodorant, perfume, paint, latex, talc, bleach, hydrocortisone cream, newsprint dye, cigarette smoke, car fumes, coins, banknotes, nickel, gold, silver, fizzy drinks, minerals in bottled spring water, chocolate, onions, nuts, fish, tea, coffee, oranges, tomatoes, pasta, sunflower oil, dairy products, wheat, bread products, white rice, porridge, white sugar, sweets, food colourings, sulphates, calcium chloride and rainwater. She survives on a diet of filtered water, lentils, brown rice,

CASCADE NEWS

carrots, apples, and plantain. *Sun, 23 Aug 2010.*

Kate Bailey, 18, from Bristol, fell seriously ill on 20 May 1998 with an allergic reaction to red kidney beans – without even eating one. She collapsed after smelling the beans her brother was preparing to cook in a chilli con carne. For six years, she had been allergic to pulses, nuts and spices. The beans caused her throat to swell up and she had a serious asthma attack. She was rushed to hospital and was expected to return home after a week. *Bristol Eve. Post, 26 May 1998.*

Harley Noble (above, on right) has never been able to play in his garden, because touching even a single blade of grass makes him physically sick. He has a similar reaction to fluff and hair. The four-year-old suffers from schizencephaly, a rare form of cerebral palsy known to affect just 70 people worldwide. He has the most extreme "texture sensitive" reaction ever seen by experts. Now, however, he can play outside, after local businesses donated artificial turf. He can't walk or talk, but communicates through a touchscreen computer. His mother Christina Lace, 24, from Bagillt, North Wales, said he is doing "really well" at a mainstream primary school. *The Leader (Wrexham), 25 Oct; Metro, 26 Oct 2010.*

Matt Baines, 24, found that he was allergic to his girlfriend Chloe Height once a month. For four days, whenever they kissed or snuggled up together, he came out in a red rash. She only had to brush past his arm for ugly red lumps to appear. The problem started nine months after they moved in together in Didsbury, Greater Manchester. Doctors believed Matt's skin had a sensitive reaction to the change in Chloe's hormones brought on by her menstrual cycle. The only solution was to steer clear of each other for the critical time. *Metro, 15 Feb; (Adelaide) Sunday Mail, 20 Feb 2005.*

Joanne Mackie, 28, of Erdington, West Midlands, developed blisters and a burning rash after giving birth and discovered she was allergic to her own baby. She couldn't even cuddle her newborn son James or pick him up because she was in so much pain. She was diagnosed with pemphigoid gestationis (aka herpes gestationis), a rare skin disease caused by an allergic reaction to her baby while she was still pregnant. She was put on a course of strong steroids, and after a month the blisters subsided, leaving her able to hug James for the first time without feeling pain. *Telegraph.co.uk, 29 July 2009.*

Julie Boyde, 26 was unable to make love to her husband Mike, 27, because she was allergic to his sperm. She discovered the problem when they first had unprotected sex on their wedding night and she suffered excruciating pain. "On a scale of one to 10," she said, "the pain is close to 10." Doctors in Pennsylvania diagnosed seminal plasma hypersensitivity, which manifests as itching and burning and can be fatal. Plans of conceiving a baby are out, as it seems that Mrs Boyde's body destroys her husband's sperm. *Sun, 5 Nov; Cairns (Queensland) Weekend Post, 7 Nov 2009.*

KONSPIRACY KORNER

ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR OF LOBSTER MAGAZINE, REPORTS FROM THE BUNKER ON...

MASONS ON THE MOON AND FALSE FLAG OPERATIONS

A few issues back (**FT267:27**), I referred to the public nature of the membership of a Masonic lodge in America. This is nicely illustrated by a webpage devoted to Masons on the Moon, which displays various first day cover letters created by American Masonic lodges to celebrate members who were astronauts.[1] The website shows covers created for 'Buzz' Aldrin (Apollo 11), Edgar Mitchell (Apollo 14), James Irwin (Apollo 15), Gus Grissom (who died training for Apollo 1), Don Eisele (Apollo 7) and Gordon Cooper (one of the seven original Mercury astronauts) with their lodges. The very public nature of Masonry in the US may explain why, compared to their role in European conspiracy theories, the Masons play such a minor role in their American equivalents.

A key element in the thinking of the contemporary Anglo-American political conspiracy theorist is the concept of the 'false flag', an operation/atrocity carried out by some secret state organisation and presented to the world as the responsibility of some other group or state. In the early days of the 9/11 conspiracy theories, a section of a 2001 book by James Bamford, *Body Of Secrets*, describing Pentagon proposals in 1962 to run 'false flag' terror operations which could be blamed on Cuba, as the pretext for invasion of the island, was spotted and ran like wildfire through those who suspected that 9/11 was an American 'false flag' operation. "Look," went the cry, "they've proposed it before." [2]

There are other examples in recent American history. Former Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Hugh Shelton, apparently writes in his recent memoir, *Without Hesitation*, that an unnamed member of the Clinton administration suggested allowing Iraq to shoot down a US plane to provide the pretext for war. A similar proposal was mooted by President George W Bush to Tony Blair.[3] But notice the scale of the provocation: shooting down a plane. If a single plane would suffice as a *casus belli*, why do something as extravagant and complicated as the plane-bombing of Manhattan, as many of the 9/11 theorists believe?

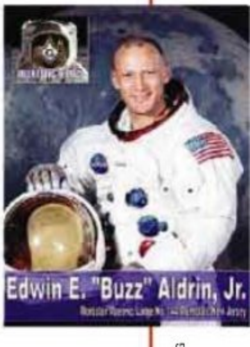

Edwin E. "Buzz" Aldrin, Jr.

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE PHOENIXMASONRY MASONIC MUSEUM & LIBRARY OF WWW.PHOENIXMASONRY.ORG

Meanwhile, in the House of Lords, Lord James of Blackheath, a significant figure in the City of London for over 30 years, made some striking claims in a speech on 20 October.[4] The media concentrated on Lord James's claim to have been contacted by a mysterious organisation he called "Foundation X", which wanted to invest up to £20 billion – or is it £70 billion, the figure he gave later? – in Britain as a contribution to rebuilding the world economy. According to Lord James, neither the Governor of the Bank of England nor the Treasury had taken this seriously, and subsequent media comment speculated that His Lordship was losing his noble marbles.

Of more interest to me was the section in his speech about handling money for the IRA, and how he "managed to write off more than £1bn of its money". He subsequently amplified this, saying that he had been placed in five companies between 1989 and 1998 by the Bank of England, with the brief to run the companies down, as they had been identified as conduits for IRA funds. "The IRA had five companies completely ruined," said Lord James. "They had built the companies up as pension funds." [5] Two thoughts: did the IRA really have a billion? And if you had destroyed the IRA's pension funds, would you really say so publicly?

NOTES

1 http://tinyurl.com/38npgqu (phoenixmasonry.org).

2 The Wiki entry on 'Operation Northwoods' is extensive and accurate.

3 General Shelton's memors are discussed at http://tinyurl.com/33an4yn (deathby1000papercuts.com), and Bush's suggestion to Blair at http://tinyurl.com/28nbxq3 (warisacrime.org).

4 Lord James's speech is at http://tinyurl.com/2vk5o7s (publications.parliament.uk).

5 http://tinyurl.com/2vx4m8x (zdnet.co.uk).

NECROLOG

We note the passing of a best-selling author of cosmic/religious reinterpretation, a photographic expert who exposed the Cottingley Fairies, and an Irish ufologist.

ZECHARIA SITCHIN

A brief, formal notice on his website was the first indication that one of the world's most popular writers on ancient mysteries was gone. Zecharia Sitchin, author of 14 books and innumerable articles on the theme of alien influence on the origins of human culture, has died at the age of 90. The last 40 years of his life were devoted to his writing and research, and he gained a massive following for his theory of the planet Nibiru and its inhabitants, the Annunaki.

Sitchin was born in Baku, Azerbaijan, in 1920. His family moved to the British mandate of Palestine (the forerunner of the modern state of Israel) when he was a little boy, so his early years and education took place there. And it was here, in a lesson on Hebrew scripture, that his lifelong obsession was kick-started, via an offhand response by a teacher to his enquiry as to the identity of the *nephilim*. Getting a brush-off instead of an answer, Sitchin was moved to find the answer for himself. What he came up with was not quite the Authorised Version.

The Old Testament (Genesis 6:4) describes them thus: "There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare *children* unto them, the same *became* mighty men which *were* of old, men of renown." (King James Version, italics as original)

For Sitchin, the *nephilim* were the 'fallen ones', and thus the people who came down from the sky, and thus space travellers, and thus cognate with the Annunaki, the pantheon of Sumerian gods and goddesses. While this sounds, on the face of it, like a synaptic space-walk, Sitchin claimed it was the fruit of patient scholarship, and a unique grasp of the cuneiform texts of ancient Sumer. Unique, certainly: no reputable scholars of Ugaritic have rushed to corroborate his claims.

JANET SITCHIN

After school in Palestine, Sitchin went to London, where he studied at the LSE, graduating in the late 1930s with a degree in economic history. He returned home to Palestine to pursue a career in journalism and editing, before moving to New York; it was here that he settled, and concentrated on his life's work, publishing his first book – *The 12th Planet* – in 1976. It made little impact initially; but by the early 1990s his theory was attracting a large and growing readership, and his books had been translated into most of the world's major languages.

Sitchin was beginning to earn his place in 'the holy trinity of pseudo-historians' (Robert T Carroll, the *Skeptic's Dictionary*, www.skepdic.com/sitchin.html) along with Immanuel Velikovsky and Erich von Däniken. Unlike Velikovsky, he caused no stir in elite intellectual circles; unlike von Däniken, he actually gave a name and location for our celestial visitors, and a comprehensive explanation for their visits.

Sitchin's *magnum opus* was a series of seven books, known collectively as the *Earth Chronicles*. The seven are: *The 12th Planet* (1976); *The Stairway to Heaven* (1980); *The Wars of Gods and Men* (1985); *The Lost Realms* (1990); *When Time Began* (1993); *The Cosmic Code* (1998); and *The End of Days: Armageddon and the Prophecies of the Return* (2007). Of the seven ancillary titles, the last (*There Were Giants Upon the Earth*) was published earlier this year (reviewed **FT269:62**).

The democracy of ideas spawned by the Internet lifted Sitchin from the lowly outpost of marginal maverick to the heady heights of demotic intellectual icon. Now, he was an authority, a point of reference, in the field of alternative (or pseudo-, if you prefer) history. Unfortunately, his prominence also left him vulnerable to the growing online community of specialist debunkers. There are sites with names as maliciously specific as sitchiniswrong.com (I imagine the 'about us' page is rarely hit).

Those who knew him well describe Sitchin as courteous and cordial, and interested in everything. Interviews also show him as driven, voluble, pompous, and utterly sincere: the epitome of dedicated maverick scholarship. My own acquaintance with him is limited to a brief telephone conversation on legal matters; but he seemed nice enough given the circumstances.

It is a mark of an idea's gain on the cultural atmosphere that even those who haven't read the books can explain the theory, and relate to its evidence base: in Sitchin's case, this constituency numbers millions, I suspect. Whether or not you adhere to his beliefs, it is churlish not to be impressed by his achievement. The online tributes are pouring in, and not just from devotees; he has apparently carved himself a lasting niche in the current recension of the Tower of Babel.

A curious footnote; Sitchin was notoriously reluctant to be drawn on the subject of Jesus. Shirley MacLaine, whose New Age colours are ostentatiously pinned, once invited the Sitchins for dinner, and entreated Zecharia for his opinions, but she was rebuffed. This was likely tact on his part; Sitchin probably thought Jesus irrelevant, and he was certainly no New Age guru. Nonetheless, there are plenty of believers out there, and it will be fascinating to see if the theory survives him, and he is assumed permanently into the populist canon.

Zecharia Sitchin, alternative historian, born Baku, Azerbaijan 11 July 1920; died New York 9 Oct 2010, aged 90.

Noel Rooney

AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHER MAGAZINE

GEOFFREY CRAWLEY

was the son of an amateur photographer. After studying Modern Languages at Cambridge, Crawley gave piano lessons and in 1963 invented Acutol, a fine-grain monochrome darkroom developer. He joined the *British Journal of Photography* and from 1966 to 1987 worked as its editor-in-chief, producing a stream of highly acclaimed technical articles. In 1982, he exposed the world's longest-running photographic hoax, the Cottingley Fairies. Between 1917 and 1920, a series of photographs purporting to show fairies and gnomes cavorting in West Yorkshire woodland were created by Frances Griffiths, 10, and her cousin Elsie Wright, 13, who had cut out book illustrations, propped them up and posed with them. The photographs were promoted by Edward Gardner of the Theosophical Society, while Arthur Conan Doyle wrote *The Coming of the Fairies* (1922), defending their authenticity. At the time of Crawley's articles exposing the hoax, the journalist Joe Cooper was conducting an investigation of his own [**FT43:48–53**]. Frances and Elsie admitted it was a practical joke that had got out of hand, but continued to insist that they had encountered real fairies in the area where the photographs were taken. Two films based on the Cottingley affair were released in 1997.

Geoffrey Wakefield Crawley, photographic scientist, born Bow, east London 10 Dec 1926; died 29 Oct 2010, aged 83.

BETTY MEYLER

Described at her funeral as a "colourful character", Elizabeth (Betty) Meyler became fascinated by UFOs following newspaper reports of a mysterious crash in the Curlew Mountains outside Boyle, Co. Roscommon, in 1996, an event described by many as "Ireland's Roswell". Amid a flurry of speculation and whispered tales of alien visitors to the Curlew Mountains, Betty decided that a small society was needed where people could meet and swap such stories without fear of ridicule. Only one person turned up for the first meeting, so Betty proposed and seconded herself for the posts of president, secretary and treasurer, and duly announced that the UFO Society of Ireland was born. She became convinced that she had discovered a UFO portal just off Church Island on Lough Key in Co. Roscommon. Her passion for the subject was infectious, and by the time she came to organise her first international UFO conference, she had been the subject of several documentaries and had been interviewed by almost every radio station in the country.

Born in India to Henry Mountain, editor of a Catholic newspaper in Calcutta, and his Italian-English wife Ida Martinelli, Betty travelled to London aged 17 and then to Nigeria with her boyfriend Donald Henderson, whom she married in Lagos. They had three children before moving to Guernsey, where they ran a small hotel. Betty took flying lessons and got her pilot's licence. Her instructor was a former RAF officer called Jack Meyler who, after her marriage ended, moved with her to Co. Sligo in Ireland, where they ran a small hotel on the shores of Lough Arrow. The romance and the business floundered, and Betty moved to nearby Boyle. She was a keen dowser, and locals who were wheedled into bringing foreign film crews out on Lough Key were bemused to see her, in her late 70s, seated in the boat, swinging her pendulum as she scanned the skyline for evidence of the UFO portal. Betty's friend Carl Nally now runs the UFO Society of Ireland. *Elizabeth (Betty) Meyler Henderson, President of the UFO Society of Ireland, born India 21 July 1931; died Ireland 24 Oct 2010, aged 79.*

FOR MORE STRANGE DEATHS GO TO:
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Strange deaths

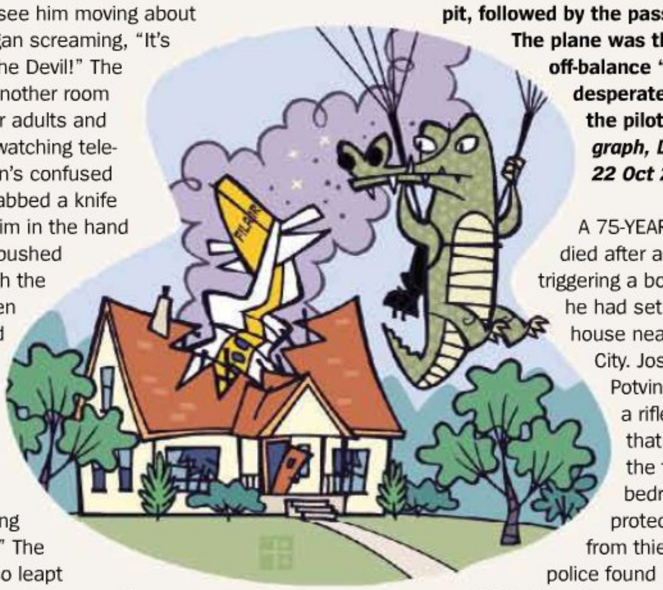
UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A BABY DIED WHEN A FAMILY OF 12 LEAPT from a second (or third) floor balcony on 23 October, thinking they were fleeing the Devil. Eight more were injured, some seriously, when they jumped 20ft (6m) into a car park in the Paris suburb of La Verriere. The baffling incident began around 3am when one of the occupants, a 30-year-old man of African origin, heard his child crying, and got up to feed the child. His wife awoke to see him moving about naked and began screaming, "It's the Devil! It's the Devil!" The man ran into another room where 11 other adults and children were watching television. The man's confused sister-in-law grabbed a knife and stabbed him in the hand before others pushed him out through the front door. When the man forced his way back in, they all began screaming in terror and leapt from the balcony shouting "Jesus! Jesus!" The naked man also leapt from the balcony. A four-month-old baby died in his mother's arms, while a two-year-old girl was critically injured. Police say they found no evidence of hallucinogens or unusual religious rituals. *Belfast Telegraph, 24 Oct; Sydney Morning Herald, Canberra Times, 25 Oct 2010.*

AN ESCAPED CROCODILE CAUSED A PLANE crash on 25 August, killing 20 people. The internal flight in the Democratic Republic of Congo got into trouble when passengers stampeded in the cabin, throwing the Czech-made, twin-engined Let L-410 Turbojet off balance, the sole survivor told investigators. The crocodile survived the crash, only to be dispatched with a blow from a machete.

Danny Philemotte, 62, the Belgian (or Dutch) pilot and owner of the plane's operator, Filair, struggled in vain with the controls, with Chris Wilson, his 39-year-old first officer, from Shurdington, Gloucestershire. The plane was on a routine flight from Kinshasa to the regional airport of Bandundu. It crashed into a house a few hundred feet from its destination. The occupants of the property were not in at the time.

A passenger had hidden the crocodile, which he planned to sell, in a big sports bag from which it escaped as the plane began its descent. The report of the incident said: "The terrified air hostess hurried towards the cockpit, followed by the passengers." The plane was then sent off-balance "despite the desperate efforts of the pilot". *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 22 Oct 2010.*



TERRY COLON

A 75-YEAR-OLD MAN died after accidentally triggering a booby trap he had set up in his house near Quebec City. Jos Lawrence Potvin had rigged a rifle to a string that ran across the floor of his bedroom to protect his home from thieves. The police found his body on 21 October. It appeared he had been preparing a meal when he set off the trap by mistake. *[CP] (Toronto) Globe and Mail, 23 Oct 2010.*

ANTOINE DENIS, 66, A RETIRED PAINTER AND decorator, was found lying on his back in the bedroom of his flat in Chatham, Kent, on 9 January 2010. Detectives at the scene declared the father of four dead, but found nothing that suggested a crime had been committed, even though the front door was ajar. It was only when undertakers arrived to remove the body that they found blood and a 4.7in (12cm) knife stuck up to the hilt in his back. A spokesman for Medway Police said one officer was "spoken to about procedural issues and no further action was taken". At the inquest in October, the coroner criticised the police handling of the unsolved murder and recorded a verdict of unlawful killing from a single stab wound. *D.Telegraph, Sun, Metro, 12 Oct 2010.*

the **UFO** files

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FLYINGSAUCERY

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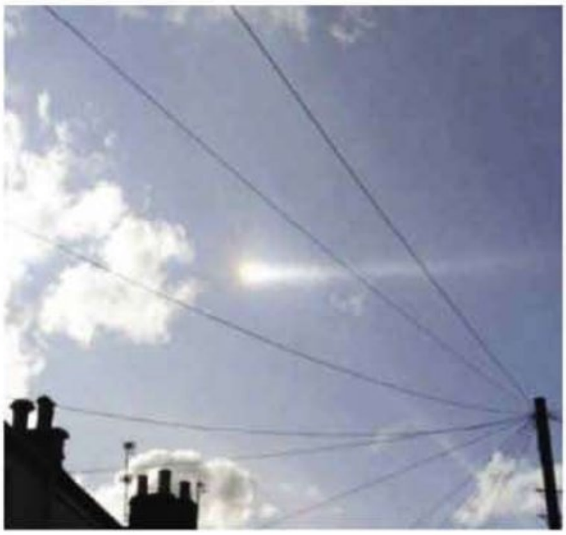


SWNS / MATT PINLESS

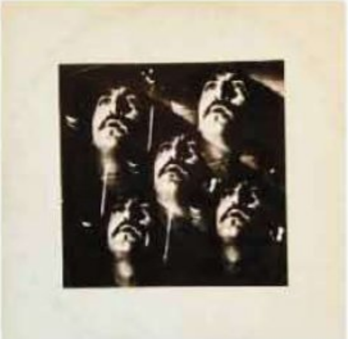
During the past two years, we have highlighted numerous examples of fake 'UFO' images that spread like viral legends, fooling both tabloid newspapers and their readers (see **FT245:28**; **257:30**; **267:30**). Further examples of recycled UFO photos surfaced in October when the *Sun* published images it said showed a silent "triangular craft" that crept over the town of Rotherham, Yorkshire, home of foreign secretary William Hague. The paper claimed the camera phone image had been snapped by teenagers Nayab Ahmed and Anny Cummings. Comparisons were made with the triangular UFO seen over Belgium in 1990 that led the authorities to scramble F-16 interceptors. But eagled-eyed UFO watchers noticed the image was suspiciously similar to that sent to BBC Radio Bristol presenter Peter Rowell in August. A listener claimed this showed "a meteor going across the sky from east to west". But the photo was actually taken the previous September by a youth worker, Matthew Pinless, in Cheltenham. Matthew was on his way to a park in the Gloucestershire town when he spotted what he described as a bright ball of light streaking across the sky (above). He took two pictures on his mobile phone before it vanished. Astronomer Dr Robert Massey identified the phenomenon as a sundog or "mock sun", created by the refraction of sunlight by hexagonal-shaped ice crystals in cirrus clouds (for further discussion, see **FT226:31**). The Rotherham photo appears to be a doctored version of Matthew's original, with the sundog now transformed into a triangular UFO. Later in October, the same image appeared again in a Devon newspaper, this time snapped in Exeter. We hope Matthew is charging royalties on his image! *Mail Online, 2 Sept 2009: http://tinyurl.com/nwoxcw (dailymail.co.uk); Sun, 25 Oct; Exeter Express & Echo, 27 Oct 2010.*

SPOOK ROCKETS RETURN?

A media-driven scare about a "mystery missile" filmed off the California coast near Los Angeles in November (see **FT270:14**) has drawn comparisons with the ghost-rocket flap that gripped Scandinavia in the aftermath of World War II. The images, captured by a CBS news helicopter crew, appeared to show the vapour trail of a missile rising from the ocean 35 miles (56km) offshore. The "mystery" was a gift for conspiracy theorists, who pounced upon a Pentagon statement that denied all knowledge of a missile launch. Speculation was encouraged by a former US Deputy Secretary of Defence, Robert Ellsworth, who weighed in to suggest it was a US missile deliberately fired from a submarine "to demonstrate, mainly to Asia, that we can do that". As the mystery grew, further footage of mystery missiles emerged from elsewhere in the US. But ContrailScience.com revealed the "missile" was simply the contrail of an aircraft flying head-on towards the cameraman, distorted by a trick of perspective. Although the contrail is actually five miles (8km) high, it appears to touch the ground because of the curvature of the Earth. Many other examples of "contrail scares" are known across the world, and US sceptic Bob Sheaffer believes this might explain the famous Swedish wave of 1946 that immediately preceded the flying saucer era. Writing on his splendid new blog 'Bad UFOs', Sheaffer notes that despite the facts about the Californian footage being in plain view, the story has now morphed into a mystery that refuses to be debunked. *http://badufos.blogspot.com/; http://tinyurl.com/32pkvcx (contrailscience.com).*

IT'S A MYTHTERY

There are many connections between rock music and UFOs. For instance, flying saucers on album covers such as Wishbone Ash's *Argus* and the UFO interests of David Bowie and Keith Richards. But there are few cases of musicians being abducted by them. That was until the strange story of obscure psychedelic folk musician Jim Sullivan. A seventh son of a seventh son, Sullivan stalked the fringes of the hippie dream, hanging out with rock stars and getting a bit part in the cult film *Easy Rider*. His talent as a singer-songwriter eventually scored him a record deal, and saw the release of his 1969 album *U.F.O.*(below), the title track musing on the question, "Did he come by UFO?" The question should perhaps be "did he go by UFO", because in 1975, with success eluding him, Sullivan's VW was found abandoned in the desert. No trace of his body was ever found and friends and family speculated that he'd achieved his wish of being taken by aliens – as he always claimed would be the case. In 2009, a concerted effort by record label Light in the Attic to locate Sullivan failed, leaving *U.F.O.* as his lush musical legacy, and his disappearance another strand in the web of music-saucer connections. *http://tinyurl.com/28nxekm (YouTube).*



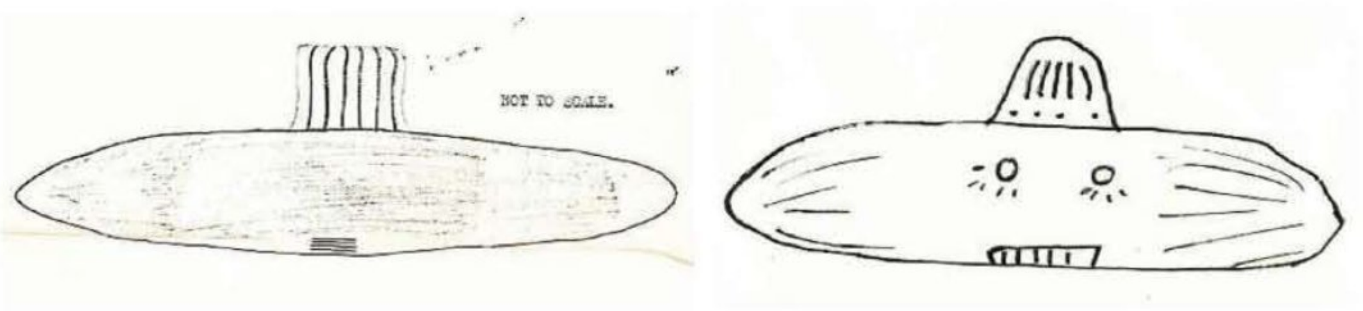
ALL ALONG THE WATCHTOWER

It's the sort of thing that drives 'serious' ufologists to distraction. But the UFO viewing tower situated in the small town of Hooper in south-western Colorado's San Luis Valley is proving to be something of a tourist attraction. The valley itself is reputed to be one of the world's most UFO-haunted spots, and for two dollars the saucer-curious can ascend the watchtower to see if they can catch sight of one (59 UFOs have been reported since its construction in 2000). Owner Judy Messoline appreciates that for ufologists a visit to her UFO observatory isn't just about trying to see mysteries of the sky – it's equally about sharing a subculture and being among like-minded souls. "The world needs a place where people can go to talk about their experiences and not be laughed at," she said. *http://tinyurl.com/32w45w5 (New York Times).*

UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES FINDS HIDDEN PATTERNS IN CASES WIDELY SEPARATED BY TIME AND PLACE

LET'S PLAY UFO SNAP!


NOT TO SCALE.

ABOVE: Witness sketches showing the two UFOs, with Farmer J's Staffordshire sighting at left and the Darco craft right. Is this is a case of UFO Snap?

If you don't fancy spending your nights standing on a freezing cold hilltop watching the night skies, it's still possible to do some UFO investigation by trawling real-life cases for previously undetected similarities – UFO Snap! By way of illustration, here are two seemingly unconnected and straightforward encounters that together hint at something more intriguing.

HEDGE TRIMMER

A local newspaper in the Midlands offered the first pointer with a small item mundanely entitled "My Close Encounter" and describing a sighting by a local farmer near the village of Tittensor, Staffordshire. A follow-up by experienced investigator Martin Keatman produced the kind of report that is the lifeblood of all UFO archives – a tantalising blend of the ordinary and extraordinary.

It occurred on a chilly December night in 1978, when "Farmer J" was driving from his home to the local hospital to collect his wife after her shift there. This routine allowed the time to be pinpointed quite accurately as 9.56pm. Suddenly, Farmer J saw two very bright lights moving towards him across the hedgerows surrounding the narrow, country lane. He drew to a halt in a muddy turning-point and wound down the window. There was no sound, despite the proximity and low height of the approaching object, puncturing his theory that it was a helicopter. Farmer J described its smooth motion through the sky as akin to a submarine in water.

Switching off his car engine, he got out and climbed a small embankment, getting a perfect view as the low-flying 'craft' banked to reveal its full shape and glided above the fields to cross the lane some 40 yards (37m) away. Indeed, he said it was so near that had he thrown a stone he could have hit it. But instead he gazed in awe at the strange spectacle. The object banked again, to avoid a tree and telegraph pole, and headed away north-westwards as he returned to his car.

The solid, metallic UFO comprised a long oval base tapered at both ends and a pillbox-like dome on top. It was about 35ft long and 10ft wide (11 x 3m). The dome was about 10ft by 10ft and light poured through five or six dark struts separating it into small compartments. On the centre of the base was a curious and distinctive grille consisting of several bars perhaps three feet long (90cm).

> Three years after Farmer J's sighting, there was a similar one

We might think about an airship or hot air balloon, for instance, which were considered in analysis. But there was no trace of any of these locally and the witness testimony involving silence, speed and the manœuvres does seem to dispel these suggestions. In the end, we classed this case as unidentified.

IN THE DARCO

Three years after the above sighting (and reported in apparent ignorance of it) there was a very similar one. This happened at almost the same local time (9.30pm), again on a dark country lane surrounded by open land, hedges, trees and power lines. It also occurred at a similar time of year (24 November 1981) – although this repeat occurrence took place over 4,000 miles (6,500km) away, just outside the small Texas settlement of Darco, where it was investigated by local MUFON investigators Jean Fuller and John Combest. They did exactly what Martin Keatman had in the UK and retraced the steps of the primary witness.

This man was driving yards from his homestead with a young woman along a rural road. Approaching from the north-east was an object with two bright lights. It moved in very low and close and they stopped their pick-up truck to watch as it tilted to reveal its full structure. Again, there was absolutely no sound despite the quiet surroundings, and the couple drove off along the road and watched as the UFO banked to cross the bushes at the side of the lane and move away to the west and north. The direction and banking of the UFO were remarkably similar to those of the object seen in Staffordshire three years earlier, as indeed were its estimated (and calculated) height, distance and speed. The two craft were also physically alike. The Darco object was another cigar-like oval (about 25ft / 7.6m wide) with tapered edges and a small cupola-like dome on top. This had several vertical streaks on the surface (that in the sketch could be termed strut-like) and, on the base, seen when it tilted towards them, a small, square grille-like pattern of windows from which light emerged.

Overall, the impression on studying these files is of the same object repeating its encounter in similar locations at the same time of day and year – but on two separate continents. However, there were some minor differences. For example, the Darco UFO shone two beams onto the highway around the car and had a few small coloured lights seen at close range on the edge of the cupola.

SNAP!

Together, these cases show how UFO Snap! can be an enlightening exercise. Only by careful reading of case reports and seeking patterns would the match-ups here become apparent. Once you've done that, it practically leaps out at you that these two sets of witnesses independently encountered the same object. This leaves us pondering what these witnesses chanced upon on these isolated roads. The most obvious IFO has to be a helicopter, which can pass low while examining power lines (a feature of both locations). Although we can probably never eliminate that explanation, there are several reasons to be doubtful about it – not least the total absence of sound. Moreover, the main Darco witness worked for the local power company – the most likely source of any hypothetical craft.

There are other cases like these two in the UFO records, as Dr J Allen Hynek said when the Darco case was reported to him. So, we should be searching for further examples in the extensive UFO records – they may form a pattern revealing further pieces of a puzzle that belong together.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST

FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

28 CALIFORNIA FLESH FALLS

Forteans will be familiar with falls of fish and frogs, but there are some gorier showers on record too. **JOHN HAIRR** unearths tales of flesh and blood raining from the skies over 19th-century California.

Accounts of flesh and blood raining down from the heavens have been recorded since the days of antiquity and witnessed by people from all over the world. Today, meteorologists and aerobiologists can explain the cause of many of these red rains as dust particles or bacteria. But what about reports of flesh falls? Pieces of flesh and gore have been known to fall from the sky, even in the days before powered flight. Some of the best examples of these events occurred in California in the 19th century, where eyewitnesses not only saw flesh and blood falling, but in some cases were even pelted by bits of meat.

The earliest flesh fall documented in California occurred in the summer of 1850 at a military outpost in Benicia, a bustling town strategically located on the north shore of Carquinez Strait. The United States Army established a military installation here in 1849, which eventually came to be known as Benicia Barracks. Thanks to the military activity and the influx of people passing through to seek their fortunes in the California gold fields, Benicia was a hive of activity.

On 20 July 1851, pieces of flesh fell from a clear sky upon the military post at Benicia. Some of the soldiers were struck by the falling meat – including Major Robert Allen of the 2nd Infantry Regiment, the Assistant Quartermaster in charge of the Division Depot. The strange shower, which lasted nearly three minutes, scattered pieces of meat of various shapes and sizes over an area of ground 900ft long by 400ft wide (275 x 120m), or approximately five acres (2ha). The only weather of note was a strong westerly breeze, but no whirlwinds.

CAPUCINE

On 20 July 1851, pieces of flesh fell from a clear sky upon the military post at Benicia. Some of the soldiers were struck by the falling meat – including Major Robert Allan of the 2nd Infantry.

Word of this episode travelled fast. Four days after the unusual fall, a brief article appeared in the *San Francisco Daily Herald* describing the event: "The pieces were from the size of a pigeon's egg up to that of an orange – the heaviest weighing three ounces [85g]. No birds were visible in the air at the time. Specimens of the meat, which is apparently beef, were preserved by Major Allen and the Surgeon of the Post. A piece that was examined three hours after it fell showed a portion of a small blood vessel, some of the sheath of a muscle and muscle fibre. It was slightly tainted." [1]

Although one of the surgeons on duty at Benicia was solicited to write an account of this fall, he apparently never did so, or if he did compile such a report, it has long since been lost. Thus, the Benicia flesh fall escaped the scientific scrutiny that earlier flesh falls garnered, such as one that occurred near Lebanon, Tennessee, in 1841, which was studied in minute detail by scientists across the country.

A dozen years later, during the dark days of the American Civil War, a shower of flesh fell from a clear sky upon Sacramento, California's state capital. On Wednesday, 25 March 1863, pieces of meat descended upon the home of a man identified as Mr Kiernan, who lived in the western part of the city on a small farm that occupied the block bordered by 18th, 19th, E and F Streets. Kiernan was outside with a friend, John Dean, when the shower occurred. They first noticed something unusual was going on when they spied Kiernan's large flock of chickens eating something, which the two men discovered to be a fleshy substance they saw falling from the sky. Much to the chickens' delight, the shower lasted a few moments. Before his chickens could consume all of the meat, Keirnan collected some of it for further study.

"This material fell in different-sized pieces or slices, the largest of which were three or four inches [8–10cm] in length, two inches [5cm] in width, and weighing nearly a quarter of a pound [113g]," wrote a correspondent for the *Sacramento Daily Union*. "In texture and substance, the material resembled that of liver, partially masticated or granulated. The grain was less distinct that that of beef. The sky at the time of this occurrence was extremely clear and free from clouds or mist."[2]

Nine years after the Sacramento Flesh Fall, a similar incident took place nearly 100 miles (160km) away, near the head of San Francisco Bay at San José. This was the most thoroughly documented of the 19th-century falls of flesh in the area, thanks in no small part to the work of Dr Albert Kellogg and the California Academy of Sciences. Originally known as the California Academy of Natural Sciences, this San Francisco organisation was formed in 1853, where the group operated a very popular natural history museum. Among the association's founders was Dr Kellogg, a man of many interests who was not only a physician but also one of the foremost botanists of his time. He filled several leadership positions at the academy during his lifetime, and it was while serving as the group's librarian in 1869 that he received details concerning a shower of flesh in San José.

This fall occurred in February 1869. The *San Francisco Chronicle* mentions it in their 20 February 1869 edition, but does not specify its exact date. On the day in question, at 3pm local time, flesh fell from a clear sky, covering several acres. Several people witnessed the fall, with some being struck by meat as it rained down. Witnesses noted a variety of materials which, in addition to meat, included bone and a substance identified as "nerves".[3] "The ground to the extent of about five acres [2ha] was covered with meat, which fell from a clear sky. One gentleman who was standing in the field was pelted with little chunks, and another made quite a collection of the fragments for the editor."[4]

Samples of the materials were gathered together, along with accounts of the incident, by a Mr Houck, who sent them to San Francisco to be studied by the learned men of the Academy. At their regular meeting held on 1 March 1869, Dr Kellogg presented the materials to his colleagues, and a lively discussion followed amongst the 15 members present. Several theories were bandied about in an effort to explain the fall. Whirlwinds were suggested, but some felt there were pieces of bone too big to have been picked up and carried very far by this method. And there were no whirlwinds reported in San José at the time. There were also suggestions that regurgitating vultures were to blame, but eyewitnesses observed no birds overhead.[5]

In their final report, the scientists gave a detailed account of the event. "This meat was alleged to have fallen about 3 o'clock pm, when the sky was clear, and to have struck persons upon the shoulder. Reports were read from persons in San José, in which it was stated that flesh, brains, blood and bones were scattered over an area of 20 acres [8ha]. The samples of flesh introduced had a fishy smell."[6]

Sadly, although the samples of meat and flesh from the 1869 San José Meat Shower were added to the museum's world-renowned collections, scientists today are unable to study these unusual specimens, as they are believed to have been destroyed, along with most of the academy's collections and archives, by the fire that ravaged San Francisco following the Great Earthquake of 1906.

Six months after the San Jose fall, another rain of flesh fell upon California, this one nearly 350 miles (560km) away in Los Nietos Township, just to the southwest of Los Angeles. Today, Los Nietos is part of suburban LA, but at the time of the incident this was a rural area made up of farms, ranches and fruit orchards. The fall of flesh occurred at noon on 1 August 1869 at the farm of Mr J Hudson, where people were gathering for a child's funeral. The mourners were stunned when meat and blood fell from a perfectly clear sky, covering approximately two acres [0.8ha] of ground on the farm, including Mr Hudson's nearby cornfield. The largest piece of meat measured 10 inches [25cm] in length.[7]

"The blood that lodged upon the corn blades and grass was mixed with a short, fine hair, resembling the outer coating of furred animals," wrote a correspondent for the *Los Angeles News*. "The meat, which was found over the entire two acres [0.8ha], was in pieces ranging from fine particles to strips of six or eight [15–20cm] inches in length, and had the appearance of being freshly torn from some animal or animals. Mr Parker exhibited to us several pieces of the meat, varying from one to six inches [2.5–15cm] in length, one of which appeared to be the lights of some animal; another, picked up by a gentleman present, was the lower part of a heart, in perfect shape, and about one and a-half inches [3.8cm] long."[8]

Word spread that samples of the meat from the strange fall were located in the offices of the *Los Angeles News*, and people swamped the place hoping to catch a glimpse of the mysterious material that had fallen from the sky. But members of the newspaper's staff told a disappointed crowd that they had not kept any of the samples, merely examined those brought by the office by Mr Parker. The aforementioned correspondent for the paper summed up their view of the entire episode: "That the meat fell we cannot doubt. Even the persons of the neighbourhood are willing to vouch for that. Whence it came, we dare not say."[9]

Just over a year after flesh fell on Los Nietos, another gory shower fell upon California. This incident took place on 15 September 1870 at the home of John Baldwin, who lived near Juapa in Riverside County. This time there were no huge chunks of meat and bone, just large clumps of what appeared to be coagulated blood. As with the earlier incidents, there were no storm clouds or birds flying overhead, just a clear sky.

An account from the local newspaper, the *Guardian*, gives some interesting details:"On the 15th instant, a shower of blood fell at the dwelling of Mr B. spattering the doorstep and the surrounding grounds. There had been only an instant before a perfect calm, without a cloud in the horizon, when suddenly a whirlwind arose, scattering everything in all directions, and leaving as the result, large clots of blood in the immediate vicinity of the house. The blood is yet to be seen, almost indelible, upon the planks, roof and vicinity of the house."[10]

The final episode in this series of California flesh and blood showers took place in August of 1871 in the San Gabriel Valley, 13 miles (21km) east of Los Angeles at El Monte, a thriving community whose main claim to fame was being the western terminus of the Santa Fe Trail. In the 1870s, it was a rural area with many farms and ranches. But El Monte attracted international attention when word spread that a shower of flesh had fallen from the sky there.

Details of the event are sketchy, and there are no known scientific reports describing the nature of what fell. But word of the event spread around the world, and was even mentioned briefly in the *New York Times*. Remarkably, the best description of the incident was preserved in a newspaper published in New Zealand. "A report was current at Los Angles on the 4th ult. that a heavy shower of meat had fallen from the clouds, upon the corn fields of El Monte. About this time last year, a similar shower fell in Los Nietos, with these differences, then it was raw, now it is said to be 'boiled'; then the blades of the standing corn were 'drenched with blood', now they are moistened with a kind of homeopathic soup."[11] We hope further details of this incident will emerge in the future, and a more thorough description can be found of this intriguing "homeopathic soup".

These showers of flesh, meat and blood were not the first such incidents recorded in the United States, nor were they the last. Flesh falls along the West Coast of the United States are less well-known than similar episodes in states east of the Mississippi, and accounts such as these from California are valuable, as they help shed light on one of the most unusual natural phenomena, which to this day continues to defy explanation.

NOTES

[1] *San Francisco Daily Herald*, 24 July 1851.

[2] *Sacramento Daily Union*, 27 March 1863; see also *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 June 1863.

[3] *Proceedings of the California Academy of Sciences*, Volume IV, 1868–1872, pp46–47, hereinafter cited as *Proceedings*.

[4] *Atlanta Constitution*, 30 March 1869.

[5] *Proceedings*, p47.

[6] *Ibid*.

[7] *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 Aug 1869.

[8] *Los Angeles News*, quoted in *California Teacher*, Sept 1869.

[9] *Los Angeles News*, quoted in the *San Francisco Evening Bulletin*, 9 Aug 1869.

[10] *Guardian* (San Bernardino) 30 July 1870; see also the *Wellington Independent*, 29 Sept 1870.

[11] *Grey River Argus* (Greymouth, New Zealand), 6 Oct 1871; see also the *New York Times*, 22 Aug 1871.

HR GIGER'S REEL MONSTER

One eyewitness description forever fixed the popular image of the Chupacabra – the blood-sucking monster that stalked Puerto Rico in the 1990s. But, argues BENJAMIN RADFORD, it's a description that bears an uncanny similarity to a 1995 movie monster created by none other than cult artist HR Giger… could they be one and the same?

Hans Rudolf Giger (below) looks like a stereotypical mad scientist. He has silver-grey hair, piercing, almost hypnotic eyes, thick lips and jowls; more often than not he's photographed scowling. He is reclusive, eccentric, and often works at night – or continuously for days on end – at his art studio in Chur, Switzerland.

Influenced by Surrealist artists such as Salvador Dalí and Ernst Fuchs, Giger is best known for his macabre paintings and sculptures filled with imagery that is often sexual and grotesque, organic yet mechanical, and somehow alien. Giger's work has graced famous album covers (including those of Debbie Harry; Emerson, Lake & Palmer; and the Dead Kennedys), museums, and even two bars. He has also done design work for feature films, and won an Academy Award for his visual effects work on Ridley Scott's 1979 film *Alien*.

HR Giger's work is highly distinctive, and he is one of the world's most successful commercial artists. Like a Dr Frankenstein, Giger has created many haunting monsters in his half-century of work – demons, devils, poltergeists, aliens, and even HP Lovecraft's Cthulhu.

But there is one unique piece of design work for which Giger has never received credit, a remarkable achievement of which even he is probably unaware: creating the Hispanic vampire beast *el chupacabra*.

Giger's role in designing the monster is a bizarre case of life imitating art that has never been revealed – until now.

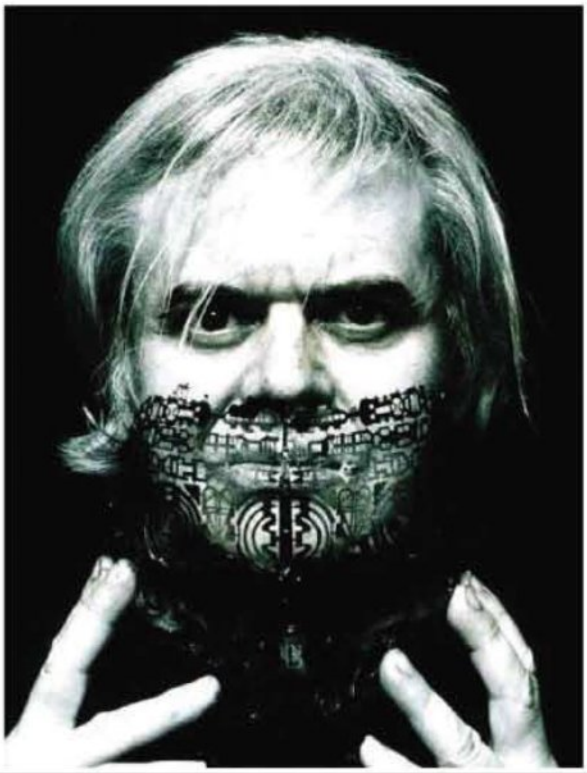
ENTER THE CHUPACABRA

Although the chupacabra's fame is widespread – it's now the world's third-best-known monster after Bigfoot and Nessie – it has been the subject of little serious, empirical research. Proven facts and wild speculation mix freely and indistinguishably in literature about the chupacabra. Indeed, Karl Shuker has lamented the "immense confusion and contradiction" surrounding the creature, making it "almost impossible to distinguish fact from fiction, and reality from hearsay and local lore".

I have spent the past five years investigating the chupacabra, including a field expedition to the jungles of Nicaragua (see **FT:257:48–53**, January 2010); the full story will be told in my forthcoming book *Chupacabra: The Vampire Beast in Fact, Fiction, and Folklore.*

By 2009, my research had answered nearly all of the central questions about the chupacabra, save perhaps the most important: its origin. Why was the goatsucker first sighted in Puerto Rico in 1995 **[FT85:9]** and not before? Real creatures don't just appear out of thin air, and even if the chupacabra is a product of folklore, it still must have come from somewhere. To understand where the monster came from, we must return to that very first sighting.

A woman named Madelyne Tolentino gave the most important chupacabra description on record, not only because of its remarkable detail but also because it is the "original" eyewitness description upon which most subsequent images of the creature are based. Tolentino claims that she saw the creature near her house in Canovanas, Puerto Rico, during the second



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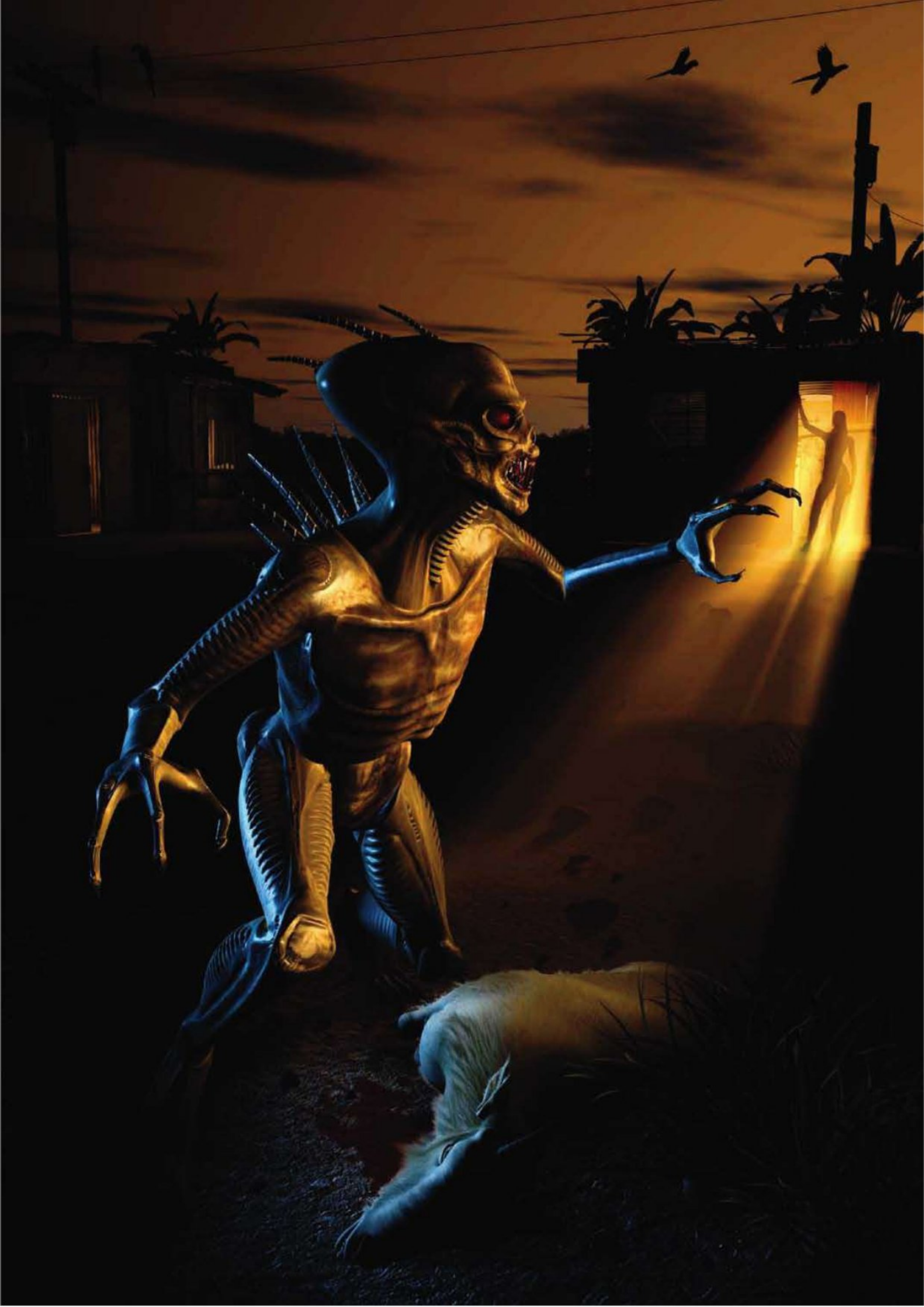


BEN RADFORD

ABOVE: The street in Canovanas, Puerto Rico, where eyewitness Madelyne Tolentino encountered the *chupacabra* – and noticed it had no anus!

week of August 1995.

Tolentino said the chupacabra she saw had dark eyes that went up its temples and spread around the sides; it was about four feet tall, walked like a human on two legs, and had thin arms and legs, with three fingers and toes at the end of each limb. It had no ears or nose, but instead two small airholes. She also noted a row of distinctive spikes on the creature's back. It stood outside a window, then moved into the road and leaped off into tall grass in a neighbouring vacant lot. Her account appears in Scott Corrales's book *Chupacabras and Other Mysteries*, and is summarised and paraphrased in dozens of books and websites as a credible and important sighting. However, a close examination reveals that the account is riddled with implausible details, contradictions, and inconsistencies.

For example, after Tolentino claimed to have seen the monster, she didn't panic but instead joked to her mother about the chupacabra's apparent lack of an anus. That she could possibly have noticed such a detail from a distance defies credulity; then she recalled that her mother ran into the street to catch the monster. She failed, but Tolentino said a local boy chased and grabbed the menacing chupacabra and pried its mouth open before releasing it into the wild. There was not a shred of evidence supporting Tolentino's incredible story, yet her eyewitness report has been treated by many writers (and the media) as valid and truthful. In fact, her description was used as the basis for a famous drawing by UFO researcher Jorge Martin that became the "standard" chupacabra image, soon to be known all over the world.[1]

TOLENTINO NOTED A ROW OF SPIKES ON THE CREATURE'S BACK

But, as the entire phenomenon arguably began with Tolentino and her sighting, the chupacabra is in big trouble; if this gold standard eyewitness account isn't credible, then Tolentino's description, and much of the information that followed it, is irrefutably tainted. Other Puerto Rican sightings followed (often producing wildly different descriptions of the creature) and reports soon spread beyond the island.

But for the past 15 years the chupacabra's origin has remained shrouded in mystery. What, if anything, did Tolentino see? Was she lying, telling tall tales, or did she actually encounter some mysterious creature? Where did she come up with the detailed description? Scott Corrales has written that "It is almost certain that the creature's origin will never be clearly established," but I will show that this pessimistic assessment was premature.

GIGER'S CREATURE

Events, even strange ones – indeed, especially strange ones – do not occur in a vacuum. There are always pre-existing physical, psychological, or sociocultural conditions that help set the stage.

In Puerto Rico in early 1995, stories and rumours spread that some mysterious vampire was preying on the island's animals, though the reports were sensationalised, unconfirmed, and lacked any significant description of the beast. Just before Tolentino's report, a new element was added to the island's social and cultural mix – something that had not existed there before and could, credibly, have spawned chupacabra sightings. The creature Tolentino described might bear no resemblance to any known animal; it does, however, look almost exactly like a fictional creature seen by hundreds of thousands of people in 1995 – a creature called Sil.

Sil was the name of the alien monster played by Natasha Henstridge in the science fiction horror film *Species*. The film begins as scientist Xavier Fitch (Sir Ben Kingsley) injects extraterrestrial DNA into human eggs, the result of which is a seemingly normal human child called Sil. But Fitch aborts the experiment when Sil begins ageing at a fantastic rate and, during REM sleep, alien spikes emerge from the girl's spine. Sil escapes the laboratory, forcing Fitch to assemble an assassination team to track down his creature over the remainder of the film's length.

The movie, directed by Roger Donaldson and written by Dennis Feldman, was a massive box office success. It earned over $113 million worldwide and spawned a series of successful sequels.

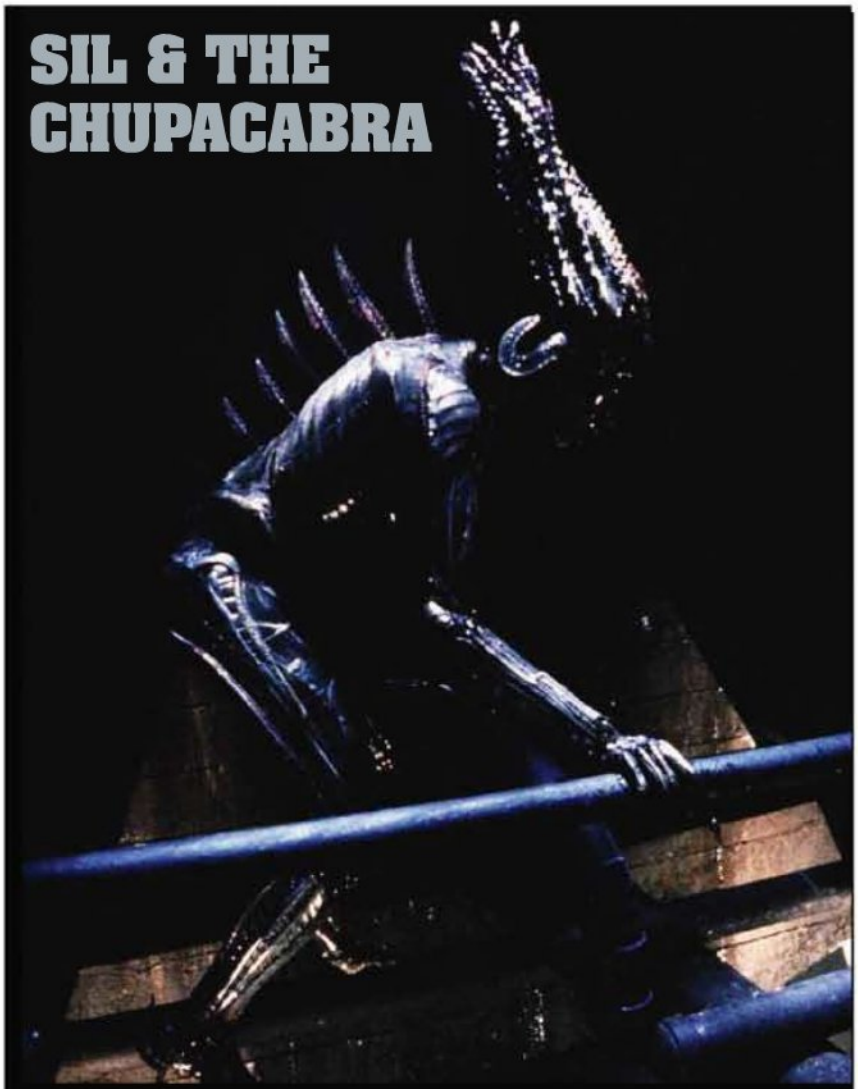
Sil was designed by HR Giger. "When we thought about the creature, we felt that Giger was the only one who could give us what we wanted," said *Species* producer Frank Mancuso Jr. Giger's Sil and the chupacabra bear a striking resemblance; is it possible that the original chupacabra eyewitness might simply have described a monster she saw in a movie? It's certainly possible; other monster witnesses have confused "real-life" monsters with ones they actually saw in films.

This lead seemed promising, but I needed more information. I reviewed the movie's press kit and production notes, and interviewed the film's production coordinator for insights into the development of the Sil alien design. I also bought a book called *Species Design*, which contained dozens of photographs of HR Giger's designs for the Sil creature.

So, just how similar is Sil to the Puerto Rican goatsucker? Well, if Giger were God, his art could have been used as a blueprint for creating the chupacabra. Sketches of the chupacabra's long, thin fingers and claws appear on page 24; its distinctive spine spikes can be seen on the *Species* creature on pages 25–29 and throughout the book. In the end, I identified over a dozen morphological similarities (see "Sil and the chupacabra"). The parallels grow even stronger when we consider Tolentino's account of the chupacabra's actions: she described it as hissing – something Sil does in the film – and also leaping fantastic distances with superhuman agility; again, something the *Species* creature also does.

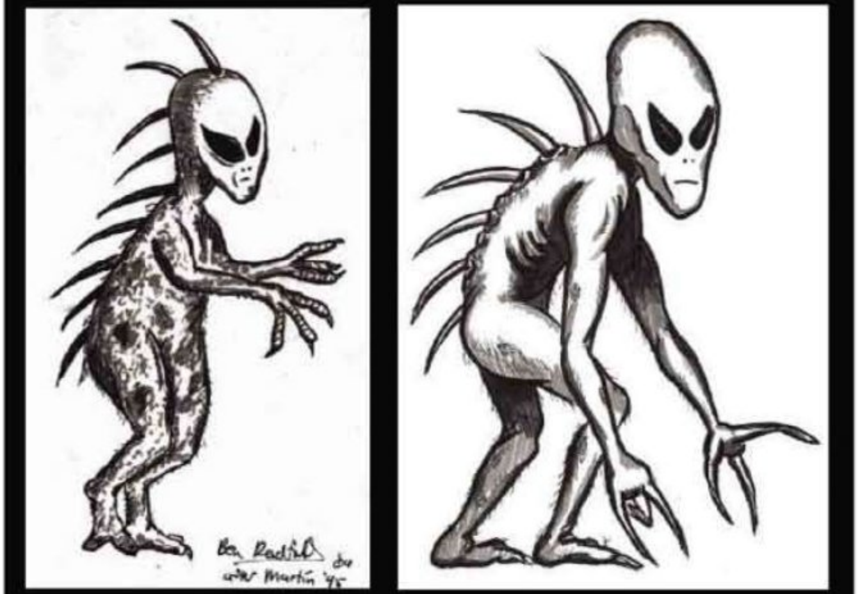
An internal 9 February 1994 memo from Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer producers Roger Donaldson and Frank Mancuso Jr to HR Giger about the creature design provides a fascinating inside look at the ideas for Sil's nature, behaviour, and physical description. It foreshadows the later description of the Puerto Rican chupacabra so well that the famous sketch of the creature could have been produced directly from the MGM studio production notes rather than Madelyne Tolentino's memory (or imagination). Donaldson and Mancuso wrote: "In the monster form, Sil must be able to move easily and fast; She must have in her biology the means by which to kill without effort… We discussed the possibilities of things like bone spurs, tentacles, and/or a barbed, sharp tongue… she should be able to burrow into the ground… she has extra-sensory ability." As for the creature's victims: "When Sil kills she should leave her victims dead in a very identifiable way. For example, if she broke or sucked all the bones [or blood] out of her victim, this would show that the body was killed by some extraordinary circumstances… Sil should leave behind some evidence that she has been at a location… (i.e. bodily fluid… odour, slime… scratches, suction marks, etc.)"

SIL & THE CHUPACABRA



THE KOBAL COLLECTION / MGM / MELINDA SUE GORDON

The chupacabra and the Sil creature from *Species* share many identical features, including: a large, oblong head; big, wraparound eye shape; black or red eyes; a small or nonexistent nose; the absence of ears; bipedalism; long, thin arms; long, thin legs; long, thin fingers; a small, lipless mouth; large spikes down the spine; and the lack of a tail.


Ben Radford dw after Martin '95

BEN RADFORD

ABOVE LEFT: The best-known depiction of the chupacabra, based loosely on eyewitness Madelyne Tolentino's account and originally drawn by Jorge Martin. **ABOVE RIGHT:** According to Tolentino, the author's recent sketch offers the most accurate depiction of what she claims to have seen.

THE KOBAL COLLECTION / MGM

ABOVE: Sil turns nasty, proving quite as vicious as the chupacabra when roused. She also shares a similar 'origin' to Puerto Rico's goatsucker. **BELOW:** Chupacabra exploitation films.

Indeed, this is a near-verbatim list of characteristics claimed for the chupacabra. The parallels are unmistakable, including the body shape, locomotion, burrowing ability, distinctive method of killing ("sucking" blood or internal organs), telepathic/ESP claims, leaving slime, distinctive odour, and so on.

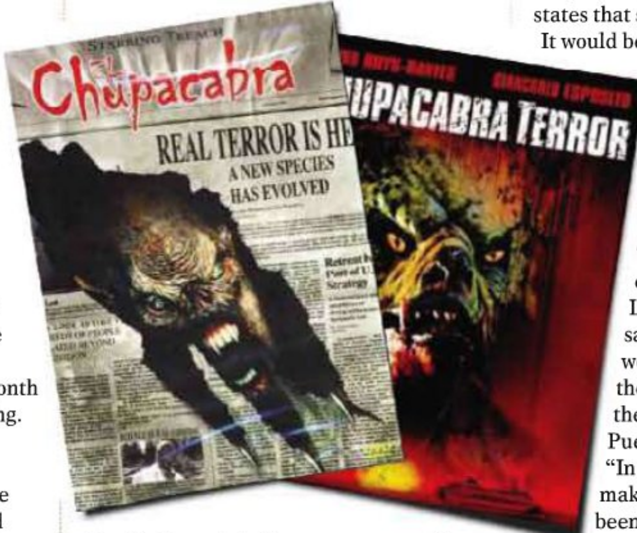
The more I researched the alien monster in *Species*, the more similarities to the chupacabra emerged – they even have identical origin stories. The two main explanations for the chupacabra are that it is either an extraterrestrial alien life form or the result of top-secret US government genetics experiments gone wrong. These happen to be exactly the two origin explanations of the *Species* creature: Sil is both an extraterrestrial alien *and* the result of top-secret US government genetics experiments gone wrong.

Furthermore, *Species* was released in Puerto Rico on 7 July 1995 – just before the Puerto Rican chupacabra hysteria reached new heights, and less than a month before Tolentino had her famous sighting.

A REEL-LIFE MONSTER

But how did a movie monster come to be seen as the dreaded chupacabra? Could Tolentino have made the leap from seeing an alien in a movie theatre to seeing it stalk the Puerto Rican countryside? Great pains were taken by all involved, from the screenwriter to the director to the special effects staff, to make the film (and especially the creature) as realistic as possible.

SIL IS THE RESULT OF A GENETICS EXPERIMENT GONE WRONG



The film's special effects were state of the art, helmed by Academy Award winner Richard Edlund (who also did visual effects work on the *Star Wars* trilogy, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and many other films), and Emmy winner Steve Johnson of XFX, Inc. The result, in 1995, was a creature far more realistic and lifelike than any previously seen on film.

Species was set in the (then) present-day of 1995, and the very first scene of the film is of a real place – in Puerto Rico no less! – the Arecibo Radio Observatory. For Puerto Rican audiences, it was a case of watching a movie set not far from their hometown, and at the very time they were seeing the film.

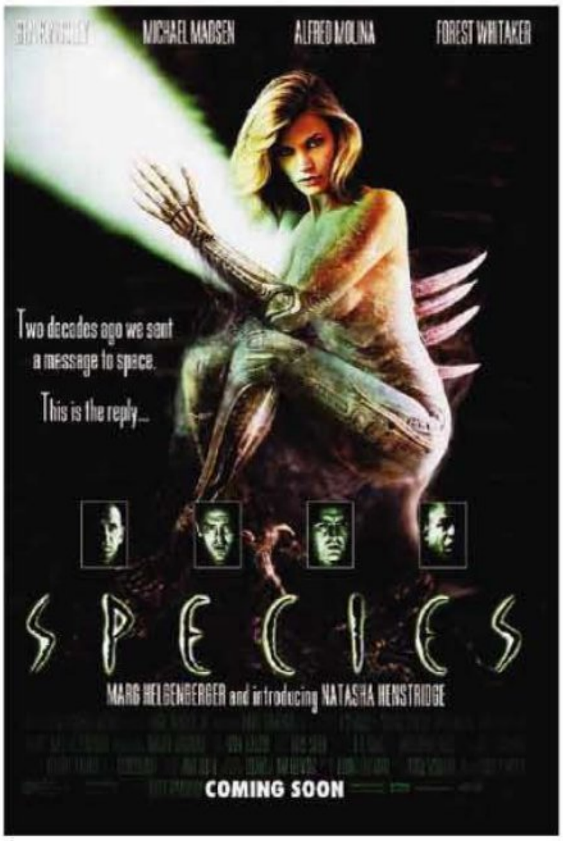
Even the *Species* story itself borrows heavily from real science. Indeed, screenwriter Feldman went to great pains to make sure that the film was as realistic and plausible as he could make it. By mixing actual events, real places, and genuine science with speculative elements, Feldman achieved a very high degree of credibility. This blurring of the line between fact and fiction, science fiction and reality, helped propel *Species* into the Puerto Rican consciousness.

For the *Species* alien to leap from the silver screen to the Puerto Rican countryside in search of goats' blood, it wasn't necessary for all, most or even a few Puerto Ricans to believe that what they saw in the movie was real. It only took one influential person, one seminal description (and some media sensationalism) to forever crystallise the chupacabra's form in the public's mind.

Let's return to Madelyne Tolentino. There is a direct connection between the film *Species* and the Puerto Rican version of the chupacabra, but unless we know that Tolentino saw the movie – and was thus exposed to its very chupacabra-like alien – prior to her seeing the chupacabra, the link is strong but not conclusive.

As it happens, Tolentino is on record as saying she did see the film before her chupacabra sighting. She told me this herself in a 2010 interview, and the claim also appears in an interview reprinted as chapter five in Scott Corrales's book *Chupacabras And Other Mysteries*. Tolentino states that she saw "a movie called *Species*. It would be a very good idea if you saw it. The movie begins here in Puerto Rico, at the Arecibo observatory. [The monster] made my hair stand on end. It was a creature that looked like the chupacabra, with spines on its back and all… The resemblance to the chupacabra was really impressive." Later in the interview Tolentino says, "I watched the movie and wondered, 'My God! How can they make a movie like that, when these things are happening in Puerto Rico?'" She is then asked, "In other words, does [*Species*] make you think there might have been an experiment in which a being escaped and is now at large? [in Puerto Rico]." Tolentino responded: "Yes."

This interview suggests that Tolentino believed that what she saw in the film was actually happening in real life in Puerto Rico at the time. This confusion between fact and fiction, reality and fantasy, leaves


MICHAEL MADSEN
ALFRED MOLINA
FOREST WHITAKER
Two decades ago we sent a message to space.
This is the reply...
SPECIES
MARG HELGENBERGER and introducing NATASHA HENSTRIDGE
COMING SOON

MGM/THE KOBAL COLLECTION

BEN RADFORD

ABOVE LEFT: *Species* opened in Puerto Rico just weeks before Madelyne Tolentino's encounter – the one which spawned the archetypal Chupacabra image.
ABOVE RIGHT: Author Benjamin Radford interviews Madelyne Tolentino and her ex-husband about her 1995 chupacabra sighting in Canovanas, Puerto Rico.

a gaping hole at the heart of chupacabra evidence. The most influential chupacabra eyewitness in history described a monster she'd seen in a movie as the mysterious beast she encountered in real life.

Though Tolentino's description is widely accepted as definitive, it is not representative of most other contemporaneous Puerto Rican chupacabra sightings. It's not as if dozens of other eyewitnesses at around the same time described an identical creature – in fact, many offered dramatically different descriptions. (Loren Coleman, for example, mentions "a relatively small number of sightings of an upright grey, spiky-haired primate in Puerto Rico").

To some, with scant knowledge of psychology, the idea that a person could or would confuse something they saw in a movie with something they personally experienced in real life may seem unlikely. However, a robust body of studies show that exactly such a phenomenon can, and does, happen – and probably more often than people realise. It could be as simple as "remembering" a personal, first-hand experience from your childhood that you were merely told about. There are several examples in the world of cryptozoology in which eyewitnesses have reported encountering creatures, aliens, and monsters that they actually saw only in films.[2]

Did Tolentino make the story up? Did she dream the whole experience, and convince herself and others that it was real? Did she actually see some animal or person or object she didn't recognise and unconsciously fill in the details with memories of the monster from the *Species* film? Or did she actually see a chupacabra that, by some astronomically unlikely coincidence, just happened to look exactly like the monster in a movie she'd recently seen? Was it all a hoax? I interviewed Tolentino at length, and in my opinion she is a sincere, honest eyewitness who – like all of us – simply has a malleable and fallible memory. With the original and most famous chupacabra sighting and depiction revealed as a cinematic creation, the case for the creature's existence is weaker than ever.

Of course, the chupacabra is a widespread and complex phenomenon, and HR Giger did not create all its details or variations. But he – along with a Hollywood filmmaking team – did unwittingly create the image of the chupacabra that is recognised by millions of people around the world. The idea that something mysterious had been killing Puerto Rico's animals had existed for some time, but before Tolentino's report no one had put a face or form to the phantom menace – and when it did happen, the form that Tolentino described was one that had been sketched out years earlier in Chur, Switzerland, by HR Giger. If Tolentino had seen a different alien or monster film at the same time, the world might have a very different image of the chupacabra.

Since 1995, several low-budget horror films (left) have been made about the chupacabra, their creatures often based upon Tolentino's "real" sighting and description. Thus the cycle continues. Truth is indeed often stranger than fiction.

NOTES

[1] *UFO Magazine*, Mar/Apr 1996.

[2] For example, Loch Ness researcher Steve Feltham describes many Nessie sightings as having been inspired by the 1996 film *Loch Ness*, and Daniel Loxton (2010) has written about how descriptions of British Columbia's Thetis Lake monster were taken directly from early 1970s horror films.

FURTHER READING

Scott Corrales: "How many goats can a goatsucker suck", **FT89:34–37**", Aug 1996; *Chupacabras and Other Mysteries*, Greenleaf Publications, 1997.

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HR Giger: *Species Design*, Morpheus International, 1995.

Mark Pilkington: "Chupacabras Fever", **FT140:22–23**, 2000.

Benjamin Radford: "Tracking the goat sucker", **FT257:48–53**, 2010.

Species press kit, MGM studios, 1995.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

BENJAMIN RADFORD is a writer and researcher of fortean topics, specialising in ghosts and cryptozoology. He is author of hundreds of articles and five books; his latest is *Scientific Paranormal Investigation: How to Solve Unexplained Mysteries* (2010), and his definitive book on this subject, *Chupacabra: The Vampire Beast in Fact, Fiction, and Folklore*, will be published in March 2011. See www.RadfordBooks.com

FBI FORTEAN BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

110. Paranoid Soundworlds

MIKE PURSLEY talks to German musician and artist Felix Kubin about Electronic Voice Phenomena, Joe Meek and the ghosts lurking within media technologies...

Felix Kubin is a Hamburg-based musician and multidisciplinary artist. His films, installations, electro-pop music, and experimental radio plays (called 'Hörspiele') are hyper-creative, challenging and unique explorations of phenomena both commonplace and obscure. Approaching his various projects from an intellectually rigorous yet playful angle, Kubin could be considered a neo-Dadaist.

In May 2010, I saw Kubin present the radio play *Paralektronoia* at the Megapolis experimental audio festival in Baltimore. *Paralektronoia* was a dexterous meld of musical performance and lecture focusing on the parapsychological effects of electronic technologies – an appropriate enough topic for an avant-garde electronic musician.

The Hörspiel surveyed audio mediumship through Electronic Voice Phenomena's spirit recording techniques (**FT104:26–30**; **194:26–30**) and delved into the talented, tormented existence of recording engineer Joe Meek. I spoke with Felix about the play and his upcoming projects.

Mike Pursley: The Electronic Voice Phenomenon (EVP) was an integral part of the *Paralektronoia* radio play. How did you become interested in EVP and what kinds of research have you conducted?

Felix Kubin: I wasn't interested in EVP in the first place but in the (assumed) connection of paranoia and electricity. The invisibility of electricity, the magnetic field phenomena that Tesla discovered and the magic of information transmitted through the so-called ether always had a certain aura of paranoia for me. In my radio play, I am talking about the technological and human antennæ. My protagonist turns into a bodiless voice – which, for the listener, he was already. In the end, a female voice tells the listeners to become radios themselves by stretching their fingers into the air and picking up the encoded data that travels the ether.

In the early days of the technological revolution, many scientists and artists seemed to be interested in both the paranormal and the scientific side of media. Most of the technical terms we use today stem from the world of the occult.

Television was the technological realisation of the magic mirror, the telephone was very close to the idea of telepathy and the word "medium" refers to the – usually female – medium in a séance who "channels" information from the great beyond or from remote countries. Those were the days when there was just one channel to watch instead of 128.

All these analogies fascinated me, and so I wanted to create an artistic work dealing with invisible voices, ghosts and electricity in a poetic way. I have to point out that I am not using the term paranoia in a pathological sense, but rather as a metaphor describing the symptoms of media history. I use it in a poetic way, from the perspective of art and philosophy. The fact that listening to disembodied voices on the radio is very close to hearing voices in one's head makes radio a haunted – or paranoid – medium by disposition.

Just check out the amazing written notes of the paranoid patient Daniel Paul Schreber from the beginning of the 20th century. The way he describes himself as a radio that receives voices and commands from a complex invisible system is an interesting contribution to media theory and has been the subject of an essay by media philosopher Wolfgang Hagen (who is also chief of the cultural department of Deutschlandradio Kultur). Many patients who suffer from schizophrenia and paranoia experience their perceptions in connection with technological media. Voices "pour" out of televisions or talk to them via FM frequencies. The technological media are often involved when it comes to hypersensitivity.

MP: Different methods for making spirit recordings were shared during the radio play. What are some of the various ways of documenting EVP?

NILS KLINGER

ABOVE: Felix Kubin at a live concert in the Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel, 2010.

FK: According to the Swedish artist Carl Michael von Hausswolff, the method of EVP was invented by Friedrich Jürgenson. Hausswolff visited his widow in the 1990s because he was interested in the vast archive of tape recordings that Jürgenson had made of ghosts. The system that he describes is very simple: find a good radio frequency – usually in the medium or long wave spectrum – and turn the recording sensitivity of your tape machine up to the maximum.

The most fascinating part of Jürgenson's work is his interpretation of what he heard. And I guess that's the reason why von Hausswolff – who is running the "department of telemagnetic media" in my Hörspiel – exhibited Jürgenson's archive in a museum in Frankfurt. He wanted to point out that Jürgenson is both an unconscious artist and an artist of the unconscious.

I am personally not familiar with EVP or any similar techniques. I use different tools to read my subconscious mind. As an artist or poet, I can claim that everything that has been said, written or created exists, especially when it becomes part of the collective memory. Legends live. Ghosts exist. And so does King Kong.

MP: In your opinion, are EVP recordings actual spirits or simply murky playbacks and a little wishful thinking?

FK: EVP is a way of reading the subconscious like art or automatic writing, one of many ways to connect oneself to the world of our imagination and the ghosts that dwell therein. Dreams and desires are part of our reality. But they are mostly less solid than a truck that runs you over.

MP: *Paralektronoia* also featured Joe Meek, a musician familiar to many *Fortean Times* readers (see *FT201:54–55*). Meek was not only obsessed with the occult and spiritualism, but on his great *I Hear a New World* album revealed a taste for ufology and space travel. What, if anything, connected Meek's pioneering recording techniques and his fixations on spiritualism and UFOs?

FK: Joe Meek tried to find a musical equivalent to express his fascination for these subjects. This included the early use of electronic instruments and tape manipulation. But this was only new in the realm of pop music. The avant-garde composers of Musique Concrète – Nono, Ferrari, Stockhausen, Schaeffer, Pierre Henry – had already experimented with these techniques in a much more advanced and daring way a decade before. If you listen to the box-set *Popular Electronics* (Basta Music) featuring Dutch composers working in the Philips studios in the 1950s, you can already find amazing results of sound art going pop.

ABOVE: Kubin at a live concert in Nantes, France, 2008.

JULIE HASCOET

For one hour, I could light bulbs with my fingers...

I don't think that Meek's recording techniques necessarily have anything to do with his fixations on sci-fi and spiritualism. He was just a playful character who loved to experiment. One of his first recordings was him screaming into the speaker of a gramophone. Every speaker is also a microphone, and with this method he could record his voice on a gramophone record. What makes Joe Meek so special to me are the special – and often terrorising – circumstances which he created in the studio. His musicians had to fulfil bizarre tasks like jumping up and down stairs while singing. Some were even threatened with a gun during the recording session.

MP: On a psychological level, what can ubiquitous electronics exposure do to us? Does it make a difference if the electronic bombardment is from analogue or digital technologies?

FK: What worries me about digital technology is that it doesn't smell. But I am neither a scientist nor a doctor. I like to be surrounded by buzzing electricity and I haven't experienced any negative side effects apart from the wish to drink more alcohol. I even got a 110-volt electric shock once when I was in Mexico. For one hour, I was able to light bulbs with my fingers. Don't try that at home, though.

MP: Your radio plays are an excellent means of investigating curious topics and artfully present your findings. What strange or little-known phenomena have been of interest to you lately?

FK: In the near future, I am creating a series of six feature episodes for the Museum of Modern Art in Barcelona, Spain, about the underground music of eastern Europe. Also, I am planning to compose a piece about test signals for Deutschlandradio Berlin and Kunstradio ORF Vienna in January 2011 – if possible, in cooperation with a dancer.

My last radio play was called *Säugling, Duschkopf, Damenschritte* ("Infant, Shower Head, Female Steps") and it dealt with those audio library records of the 1960s and 70s that provided sound effects for film amateurs. I created my own catalogue of sounds and turned it from a straight format into Musique Concrète and chaos.

Before that I made a piece called *Wiederhole 1-8* ("Repeat 1-8") about instruction manuals, using a similar method. The whole Hörspiel is constructed like a giant instruction containing many small instructions, including the assembly of a toy brain and a gun, the orientation system of astronauts and the creation of the Earth. The latter instructions I derived from the Bible.

I like to explore a system, imitate it and then let it collapse by turning it into poetry. I am fascinated by subverting systems and showing their imperfection. That's my way of contributing to the general paranoia. **FT**

MIKE PURSLEY is a freelance writer and musician based in Baltimore, Maryland. This is his first article for *Fortean Times*.

Naked Quakers

* * *

JUSTIN MEGGITT looks back at the strange world of the early Quakers, with their apocalyptic obsessions and penchant for disrobing in public.

* * *

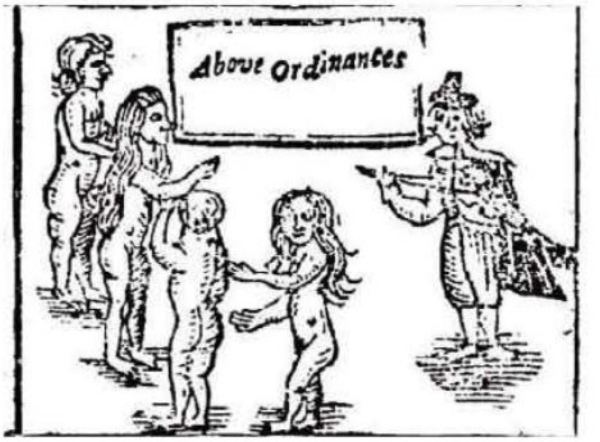
> *…a man, a Quaker, came naked through the [Westminster] Hall, only very civilly tied about the privates to avoid scandal, and with a chafing-dish of fire and brimstone burning upon his head… crying, "Repent! repent!"*
> (Samuel Pepys, *Diary*, 29 July 1667).

For those who don't think that they are a breakfast cereal, or confuse them with the Amish, Quakers today are generally thought of as a harmless, if rather worthy, Christian denomination. Indeed, in Britain at least, the *Religious Society of Friends*, as Quakers are formally called, now appear reticent about appearing *religious* at all, feeling more comfortable to claim that they "share a way of life, not a set of beliefs"[1] and happy to include atheists and humanists amongst their members.

However, the origins of Quakerism lie in the turmoil of the English Revolution, in the same feverish religious environment that gave birth to such radical groups as the Diggers, Levellers, Ranters, Fifth Monarchy Men and Muggletonians (see **FT253:46–50, 254:50–54**). But unlike the others, the early Quakers had global ambitions. Within a few years of their appearance in the north of England in the early 1650s, Quaker prophets, both men and women, were proclaiming their 'Everlasting Gospel' from Constantinople to Surinam to Lapland, and, along the way, generating more than their fair share of phenomena of interest to forteans.

Driven by an intense apocalypticism,[2] Quakers called on people to be obedient to the light of Christ within. Now was the time, they claimed, to worship God "in Spirit and in Truth" and to abandon all outward forms of religious worship. Clergy, of whatever kind, were denounced as 'false prophets' and 'hireling shepherds' and church services disrupted as the Quaker prophets demanded that all humanity awaken from the long night of apostasy that they claimed had existed since the time of Christ.[3]

The Quakers were driven by an intense apocalypticism



ABOVE: Naked goings-on on the title page of an anonymous anti-Quaker pamphlet of 1655 entitled 'The Quakers Dream'. **FACING:** Solomon Eccles, with a burning chafing dish on his head.

Although they were pacifists, such behaviour often had violent consequences. George Fox, who emerged as the leading figure in the movement, was not alone in being regularly beaten by churchgoers, angered by his interruptions to their parish worship – on one occasion he was even given a bloody nose by a clergyman who hit him in the face with a Bible to silence him.[4] However, Friends did not restrict themselves to provocative behaviour in churches. Not only did they preach wherever they felt the Spirit moved them to speak – even if that happened to be in Parliament or the court of the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire – but some did not restrict themselves to words alone: many, both men and women, stripped off.

NAKED AS ISAIAH INTENDED

In most cases, it seems that the Quakers involved were inspired by examples from the Bible, and particularly the prophet Isaiah, who went naked as a sign of judgment upon the enemies of Israel (although none of the Quakers managed Isaiah's three years of nudity) rather than as a statement of moral freedom that may have inspired radicals with a closer affinity to Ranter ideas. Solomon Eccles, the Quaker whom Pepys saw at Westminster, made something of a habit of it, though most did it rather less often[5] and with some dread, one complaining that "it was as death unto me, and I had rather, if it had been the Lord's will, have dyed then gone on in this service".[6] Others kept their clothes on but caused even more of a stir. In 1656, James Nayler, one of the movement's key leaders, entered Bristol on a donkey, with a group of followers singing 'Hosanna', in a clear re-enactment of

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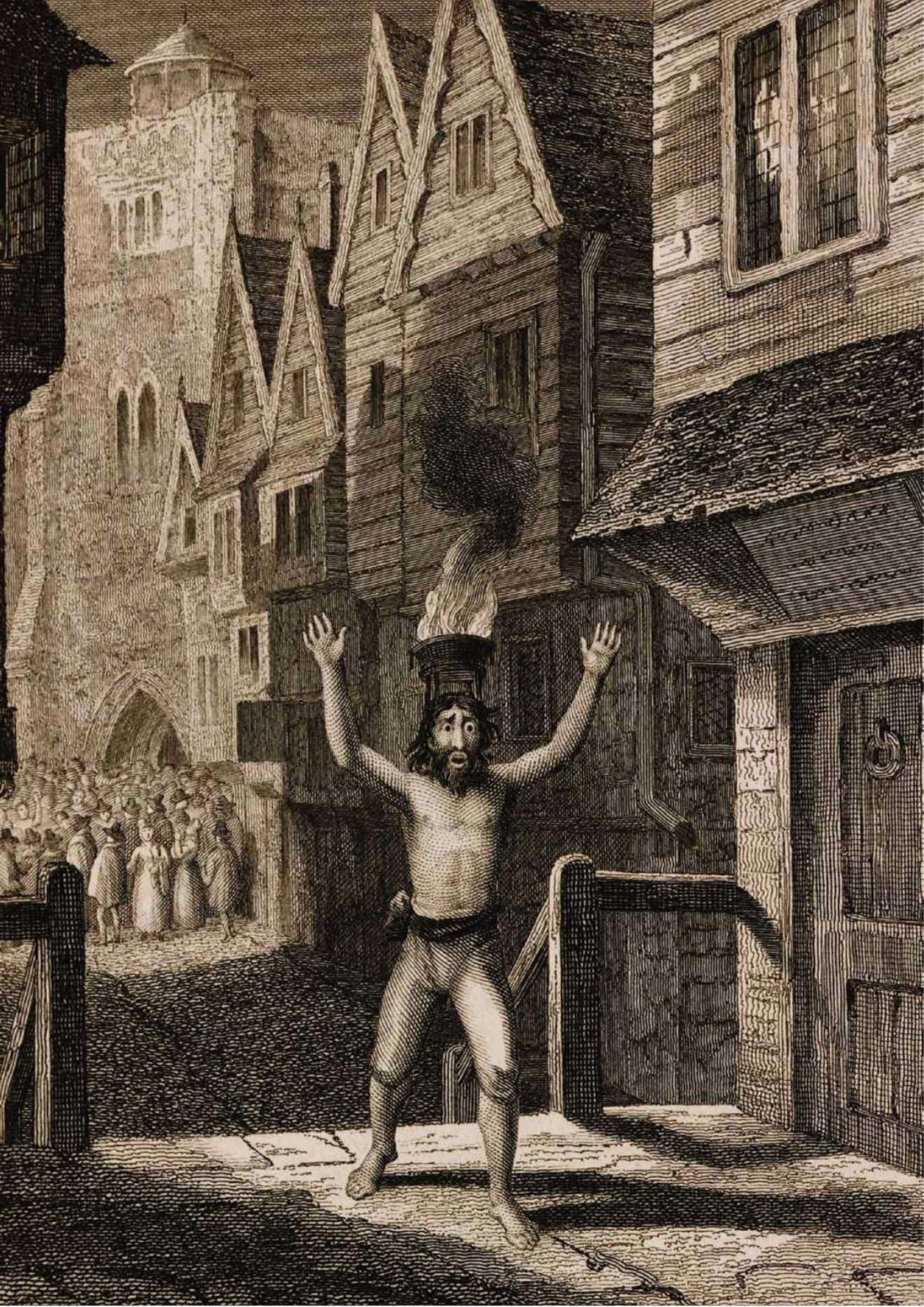
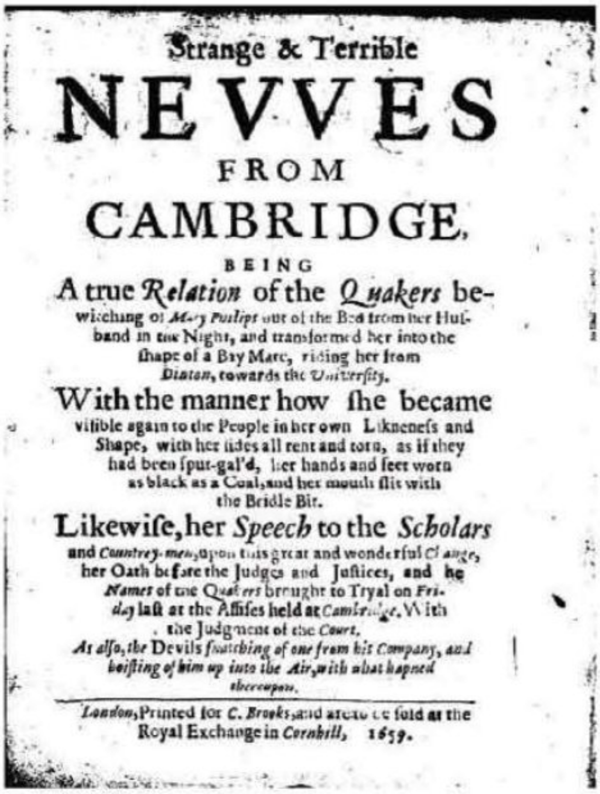


Christ's entry into Jerusalem. The scandalous event brought about his famous trial before Parliament for blasphemy. It did not help that Nayler had chosen to model his appearance on Jesus, or rather what passed for Jesus in the 17th-century English imagination. [see panel].

Such was their belief that the Quaker movement was endowed with the same Spirit as that which was present amongst the first Christians, many Friends claimed that they were able to effect miraculous cures akin to those found in the Bible. Nayler, for example, allegedly raised Dorcas Erbury, one of his entourage, shortly before his fateful entry into Bristol.[7] If this was not enough to disturb their contemporaries, their stubborn insistence on what they saw as obedience to the 'Truth' led early Quakers to adopt a number of practices that challenged the social, religious and legal cohesion of 17th-century society. These included such things guaranteed to provoke a hostile reaction as not removing their hats to anyone except God, opening their businesses on the Sabbath, Easter and Christmas day, and refusing to swear oaths in court. Although some women preachers were known in various revolutionary sects before the arrival of the Quakers, the Friends' belief that in the end times God had poured out his Spirit "on all flesh: and your sonnes & your daughters shall prophecie"[8] meant that the figure of the Quaker woman preacher became a common and troubling one to society at large as thousands took up the call (leading Samuel Johnson, in the following century, to say of such women: "Sir, a woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all.")[9]

It is unsurprising therefore that Friends were loathed by many of their neighbours[10] and became the victims of sensational accusations of magic and sexual deviance. In 1659, for example, an anonymous pamphlet entitled *Strange and Terrible News from Cambridge* recounted how Quakers had been put on trial in that city for turning a woman into a horse and riding her around the countryside at night, while the title of another published that year, *A relation of a Quaker, that to the shame of his profession, attempted to bugger a mare near Colchester*, speaks for itself. Although in the first few decades of the movement, thousands of Quakers were imprisoned and assaulted, and scores killed, early Friends seem to have thrived in the face of such persecution, interpreting it as a necessary part of their apocalyptic 'Lambs War'[11] and confirming the validity of their faith.



Strange & Terrible
NEVVES
FROM
CAMBRIDGE,
BEING
A true *Relation* of the *Quakers* bewitching of *Mary Philips* out of the Bed from her Husband in the Night, and transformed her into the ſhape of a Bay Mare, riding her from *Dinton*, towards the *Univerſity*.
With the manner how ſhe became viſible again to the People in her own Likeneſs and Shape, with her ſides all rent and torn, as if they had been ſpur-gal'd, her hands and feet worn as black as a Coal, and her mouth ſlit with the Bridle Bit.
Likewiſe, her *Speech* to the *Scholars* and *Countrey-men*, upon this great and wonderful Change, her Oath before the Judges and Juſtices, and the *Names* of the *Quakers* brought to Tryal on *Friday* laſt at the Aſſiſes held at *Cambridge*. With the Judgment of the *Court*.
As alſo, the Devils *ſnatching of one from his Company, and hoiſting of him up into the Air, with what hapned thereupon.*

London, Printed for *C. Brooks*, and are to be ſold at the Royal Exchange in *Cornhill*, 1659.

ABOVE: The front page of a 1659 pamphlet carrying the sensational accusation that Quakers had turned a woman into a horse.

Thousands of Quakers were imprisoned and assaulted

HANGED, BANISHED, PIZZLED

Despite the difficulties the movement faced at home, from the outset, the Quakers remained true to the universal claims of their apocalyptic vision and the demand in the Book of Revelation that the 'Everlasting Gospel' be preached "unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people". They were especially successful in their attempts to do this on the other side of the Atlantic, in the North American colonies and the Caribbean, although initially it came at some cost, with the execution of a number of Quaker prophets, both English and native American.[12] However, in South America, things took a surprising and perplexing turn. The Quakers who arrived in Surinam in 1657 were banished by local magistrates, and barely survived, being forced to "live among the monkeys", but according to an account obtained from an English planter who had subsequently been forced to leave the region, after the Quakers left, their message was reiterated by some mysterious visitors with apparently supernatural powers:

"And after there came a white people to Suriname, and they told them they came from the Great God beyond the sun to warn them to repent and if anyone hurt them, the Great God would destroy them and there was a Dutch man shot at them but did not hurt them so they went their way and they did not know whence they came nor whither they went."[13]

Those Quakers who went east towards the Mediterranean and beyond, rather than across the Atlantic, had mixed fortunes. Considerable resources were expended by the small and persecuted sect in supporting two major expeditions. The first, in 1657, seems to have focused upon reaching the Ottoman Sultan and proclaiming the Quaker message in the Levant. One of its members, Mary Fisher, a servant from Yorkshire, did fulfil this goal, managing to gain an audience before Sultan Mehmet IV at Adrianople in 1658. Despite being a little evasive when asked about what she thought about Mohammed, she was respectfully received, the Sultan remarking that "they could not but respect such a One as should take so much pains to come to them so far as from England with a Message from the Lord."[14] This response was in stark contrast to her earlier experience in Cambridge in 1653, where she was whipped through the streets of the city for preaching much the same message[15] and in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1656 where she received similarly rough treatment at the hands of Puritan officials who detained her on her arrival, stripped her to check for the marks of witchcraft, jailed her for six weeks, burnt the Quaker books she had brought with her, and then forcibly expelled her from the colony.[16]

Other members of this expedition were less successful. John Perrot, an Irish Friend, spent three years being 'pizzled' (whipped by a dried bull's penis) in an asylum in Rome, having unwisely sought to convert the Pope. His mental turmoil and the physical abuse meted out to cure him of his errors is vividly evoked in a remarkable epic poem entitled *A Sea of the Seed's Sufferings, through which Runs a River of Rich Rejoycing.*[17] His companion, John Luffe, fared even worse and did not make it out of the prison alive. He was either hanged or starved to death.[18]

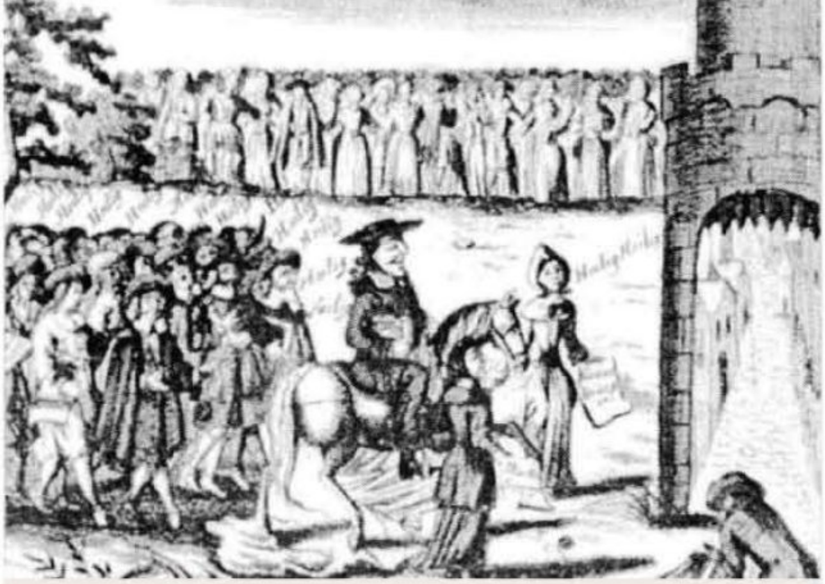
An even more ambitious expedition was launched in 1661, when a group of Friends, armed with epistles from George Fox and others, translated into various languages, "were moved to go towards China and Prester John's country"[19] – the latter being the land of the legendary Christian ruler which was thought to exist somewhere in the east, surrounded by Muslims and pagans. Two of them, John Stubbs and Henry Fell, made it to Alexandria where they sought to go overland by caravan, but soon found themselves expelled by the English consul, throwing pamphlets in Hebrew, Arabic and Latin into the streets as they went – a foolhardy activity, as printing in Arabic was prohibited in the Ottoman Empire because of respect for the language of the Qur'an; if documents containing excerpts from the text were known to have touched the ground, the Quakers would have been in considerable trouble.[20] Two others, Daniel Baker and Richard Scotsthrop, made it to Smyrna in Turkey with the intention of travelling to Constantinople, but were frustrated by the English ambassador who issued a warrant against the troublesome Quakers proceeding any further and had them sent home (one would die *en route*). The ambassador explained his motivations in his warrant: "…the Carriage of that Sort of People is ridiculous, and is capable to bring Dishonour to our Nation, besides other Inconveniencies that may redound to them in particular, and to the *English* in general."[21]

TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

In addition to these two significant missions, there were a host of other *ad hoc* and spontaneous attempts by Quaker prophets to reach all the nations of the Earth in these early years. Most failed to arrive at their destinations, falling into the hands of the Inquisition. Katharine Evans and Sarah Cheevers, for example, found themselves unable to resist the opportunity to disrupt Catholic worship in Malta when the vessel aboard which they were travelling put in at the island in 1658, and found themselves incarcerated and tortured for the next three and half years.

John Philly and William Moore, who tried to reach Ottoman territories overland, found themselves in a similar predicament when captured by Catholic authorities in Hungary in 1662.[22] Some Friends even found it impossible to cross the Channel, once those transporting them became aware of their religious identity, while others, to judge from the complaints made by English travellers who encountered half-starved Quakers on the Continent during this period, failed to get very far. As William Braithwaite, a leading historian of early Quakerism, rightly says of these missions: "There was never a more complete scorn of consequence and circumstance".[23]

In one unusual case, a Quaker appeared to fulfil his mission only for it to become apparent, centuries later, that he was in fact the victim of a hoax. The journey of George Robinson to Jerusalem in 1657 seemed to be a success similar to that of Mary Fisher. According to his own account, published in 1663,[24] this determined teenager, despite various attempts on his life, made it to his destination, though "not as a pilgrim but as a prophet", and proclaimed his message to the leading Ottoman official in the region before returning home, content that he had done what he had been



JAMES NAYLER

James Nayler (1618–1660; see **FT129:36**) was one of the first to proclaim the Quakers' Everlasting Gospel and one of the most robust at defending their unorthodox views against opponents. A former soldier in the Parliamentarian army, he was a prolific author and disputant. Opponents of the movement saw him as a leader with equal authority to that of George Fox. However, in October 1656 he was arrested for entering Bristol on a donkey, dressed as Christ, with a group of followers singing 'Hosanna', an event clearly modelled on Jesus's entry into Jerusalem as recorded in the Gospels. Indeed, subsequent interrogations revealed that Nayler's party had in their possession a copy of the *Letter of Lentulus*, a mediæval apocryphal text popular in the 17th century in which the appearance of Jesus is actually described, something never done in the Bible. Nayler clearly wore his hair and beard in the manner described in the *Letter*,[1] the former "plaine and smooth almost to the eares… divided in the midst of the head", and the latter "full and copious… with his haires not very long, but forked in the midst."[2]

Parliament was outraged by the "great misdemeanour and blasphemy" of Nayler and spent a full 11 days debating the case, something which was complicated by the fact that Parliament itself was unsure of its own authority in the matter and the extent of religious liberty that should be allowed under the new, unstable, constitutional settlement. In the end they "unilaterally tried and sentenced a man without a law and without any clear constitutional authority to do so."[3] Although Nayler was spared the death penalty, he was pilloried, whipped through the streets of London, had his tongue bored through with a hot iron, and had the letter B (for Blasphemer) branded onto his forehead. He was then sent to Bristol and paraded through the city on a horse (facing backwards) before being publicly whipped, pilloried once again, and transported back to London to suffer imprisonment with hard labour. On his release, almost three years later, Nayler returned to agitating for the Quaker cause, but ceased to be the charismatic figure he once had been and was physically a broken man. He is now most famous for his final words, uttered before his untimely death at the age of 42:

> *"There is a spirit which I feel that delights to do no evil, nor to revenge any wrong, but delights to endure all things… I found it alone, being forsaken; I have fellowship therein with them who lived in dens and desolate places in the earth, who through death obtained this resurrection and eternal holy life."*[4]

It is hard to know what exactly Nayler intended by his entry into Bristol and whether his interpretation of his actions was shared by his most ardent followers who accompanied him on that day. Although it is customary to see him as one of a string of deluded messiahs – a kind of 17th-century David Koresh – the contemporary records of his trial give us little evidence that this was the case. We are probably wrong to think that Nayler supposed that "he *was* Christ except in the sense that Christ was present in all of the saints."[5]

NOTES

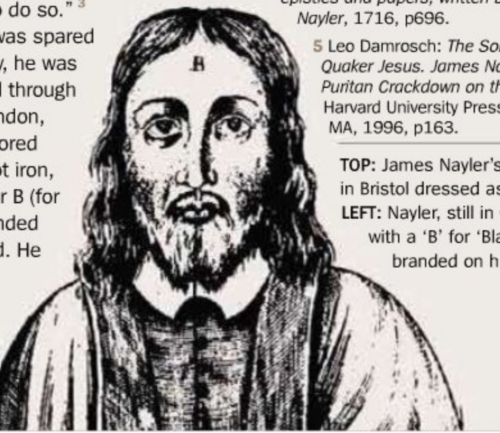
[1] See Henry J Cadbury: "Early Quakerism and Uncanonical Lore", *The Harvard Theological Review*, 40.3, pp177–205, 1947.

[2] Anon: *An epistle of Publius Lentulus*, 1650, p1.

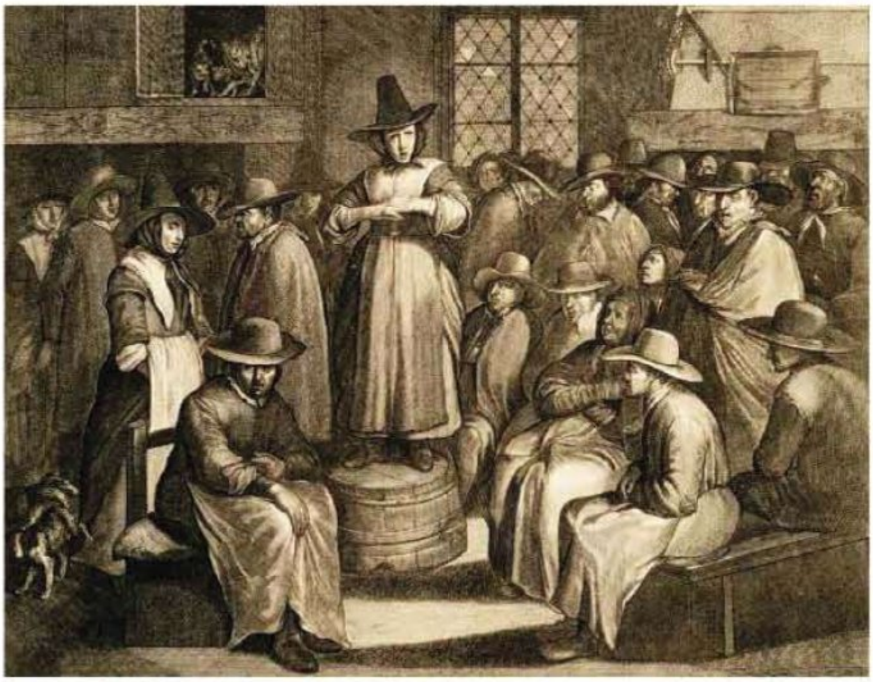
[3] William G Bittle: *James Nayler 1618–1660: the Quaker Indicted by Parliament*, William Sessions, York, 1986, p133.

[4] G Whitehead: *A collection of sundry books, epistles and papers, written by James Nayler*, 1716, p696.

[5] Leo Damrosch: *The Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus. James Nayler and the Puritan Crackdown on the Free Spirit*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1996, p163.



TOP: James Nayler's 1656 entry in Bristol dressed as Christ.
LEFT: Nayler, still in Christ mode, with a 'B' for 'Blasphemer' branded on his forehead.



CORBIS / STAPLETON COLLECTION

ABOVE: A female Quaker preaching in *The Quakers Meeting* by Egbert van Heemskerck.

called to do. However, from recent work on the archives of the Inquisition by Stefano Villani, it now appears that the young Quaker was the victim of a deliberate fraud.[25] The 'Turk in authority' to whom he preached was nothing of the sort. Aware that the Quaker would not return home until he had prophesied before the official in charge of Jerusalem, and anxious about the threat posed to the delicate equilibrium between religious groups in this particularly volatile part of the Ottoman Empire, the priests dressed up one of their servants to act the part.

The Quaker travels to the East had one unexpected and enduring legacy. In 1673, a gruesome eyewitness account appeared of the fate of three Quakers who arrived in Constantinople and, in typical Quaker fashion, disrupted worship, albeit in a mosque. Despite being given 300 blows on the soles of their feet to dissuade them from repeating this foolhardy act, a punishment so crippling that "that in a few days the putrified flesh came off ," the Quakers made themselves crutches and once again went to disrupt worship in the mosque, only this time they had "their hands chopt off, their tongues cut out, their eyes bored out, and each man… a sharp wooden stake run in at his Fundament and so quite through his body."[26]

The account of the fate of these Quakers proved extremely popular and further editions were published in 1674 and 1681.[27] However, the work is clearly a fabrication: three different years are given for when the event allegedly took place and the county of origin of the Quaker prophets is altered in the 1674 edition and excised entirely from that of 1681. Quakers were meticulous in recording accounts of those that suffered for the 'Truth' and nowhere in either Quaker records of the time or those of the English officials and merchants in Constantinople do we find reference to this sensational incident or the Quakers that the accounts name. This story tells us more about anti-Quaker and anti-Ottoman prejudice in England in the late 17th century, and the persistent interest in the exotic and macabre amongst the pamphlet-buying public, than anything else.

In time, the Quakers' apocalyptic fervour waned, and the movement began to settle down into a respectable, if eccentric, sect, somewhat embarrassed by the enthusiasm of its youth. The number of naked Quakers tailed off by the end of the 17th century and miracles became rather more scarce. Although George Fox's *Journal*, published in 1694, three years after his death, does recount a number of such events, his *Book of Miracles*, in which nearly 200 miracles were dutifully recorded, was never printed by the Society and the manuscript was subsequently lost.[28]

No more Quakers felt called to journey to the ends of the Earth to proclaim their message and what energies Friends had for overseas work was focused on consolidating their presence in the American colonies, in particular the 'Holy Experiment' of Pennsylvania, and trying to free the handful of Quakers who were slaves in North Africa, captured by privateers operating out of Algiers and Morocco. Amongst these, facing yet further deprivations, was Daniel Baker, one of those prophets who had tried to reach China and the lands of Prester John nearly 20 years earlier.[29]

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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NOTES

[1] www.quaker.org.uk/introquakers

[2] For an introduction to the *apocalyptic* nature of early Quakerism see Douglas Gwyn: *Apocalypse of the word: the life and message of George Fox (1624–1691)*, Friends United Press, Richmond, 1986.

[3] A typical example of this message can be found in Edward Burrough: *The true Christian religion again discovered after the long and dark night of apostacy*, 1658.

[4] George Fox: *The Works of George Fox*, vol.1, Philadelphia, 1831, p137.

[5] Such as Lydia Wardell, who shed her clothes in Newbury, Massachusetts, in 1663 in protest at being forced to attend church by the Puritan authorities. See Diane Rapaport: *The Naked Quaker: True Crimes and Controversies from the Courts of Colonial New England*, Commonwealth Editions, Beverly, Massachusetts, 2007.

[6] William Simpson: *Going naked [as] a signe*, 1660, p1.

[7] John Deacon: *The Grand Impostor Examined*, 1656, p18.

[8] Joel 2:28 (Geneva Bible).

[9] James Boswell: *The life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*, vol.1, 1791, p252.

[10] John Miller: "'A suffering People': English Quakers and Their Neighbours c.1650–c.1700", *Past & Present*, 188, 2005, pp71–10.

[11] For the use of this expression see, for example, James Nayler: *The lambs warre against the man of sinne*, 1657. The expression was taken from Revelation chapters 5 and 22, where the Lamb is a figure who is both slaughtered and victorious.

[12] See George Bishop: *New England Judged*, 1661.

[13] Henry J Cadbury, (ed.): *Narrative Papers of George Fox*, Friends United Press, Richmond, 1972, pp38–39.

[14] Bishop, *op.cit.*, p20.

[15] Anon: *The First new persecution, or, A True narrative of the cruel usage of two Christians*, 1654.

[16] Bishop, *op. cit.*, pp5–13.

[17] See Nigel Smith: "Exporting Enthusiasm: John Perrot and the Quaker Epic," in Thomas Healy and Jonathan Sawdy, eds: *Literature and the English Civil War*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp248–64.

[18] Rosemary E Moore: *The Light in their Consciences: Early Quakers in Britain 1646–1666*, Penn State University Press, Philadelphia, 2000, p194.

[19] George Fox: *The Works of George Fox*, vol.2, Philadelphia, 1831, p1. For Fox's letter to the Emperor of China, see *Works*, vol.4, pp252–254. Elsewhere Fox confirmed that the main aim of the mission was to reach Prester John's country (Cadbury, *op.cit.*, p187).

[20] See Daniel Baker: *A clear voice of truth sounded forth*, 1662, p28. For the dangerous implications of the Quakers' treatment of printed material in Arabic, see Nabil Matar: *Islam in Britain 1558–1685*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p135.

[21] Katherine Evans & Sarah Cheevers: *A true account of the great tryals and cruel sufferings*, 1663, p95.

[22] Joseph Besse: *A Collection of the Sufferings of the People Called Quakers*, vol.1, London,1753, pp420–432.

[23] William C Braithwaite: *The Beginnings of Quakerism, 2nd ed.*, Cambridge University Press, 1955, p420.

[24] In an appendix to Evans & Cheevers, *op. cit.*, pp277–292.

[25] Stefano Villani: *Il calzolaio quacchero e il finto cadì*. Sellerio, Palermo, 2001.

[26] Elias Wilson: *Strange and wonderful news from Italy*, 1673, p7.

[27] John Elias: *A true and strange relation of the travels*, 1674; John Elias: *A true and strange relation of the travels*, 1681.

[28] Henry J Cadbury: *George Fox's Book of Miracles*, Cambridge University Press, 1948.

[29] Kenneth L Carroll: "Quaker Slaves in Algiers, 1679–1688," *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society*, 54.7, pp301–12, 1982.

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STRANGE STORIES FROM A WORLD OF WONDER

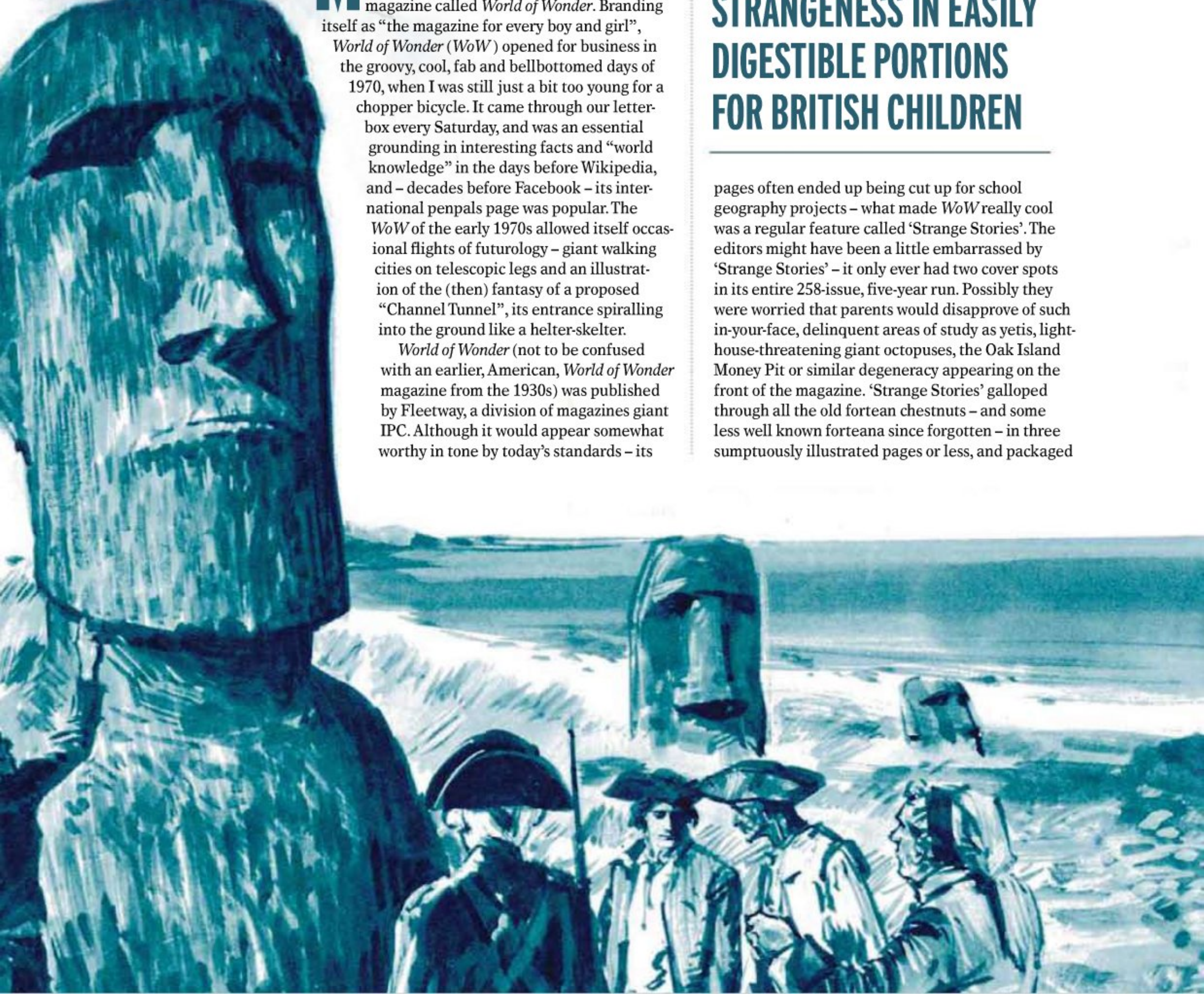
In the first of a two-part article, **MATT SALUSBURY** relives the vanished days of his childhood, when the weekly arrival of a magazine called *World of Wonder* would lift him out of the realm of humdrum reality and help set him on the royal road to forteana.

All illustrations: Bridgeman Picture Library / © Look & Learn / Private Collection

My interest in strange phenomena was first kindled at a very tender age, like a lot of other forty-something forteans, by a weekly magazine called *World of Wonder*. Branding itself as "the magazine for every boy and girl", *World of Wonder* (*WoW*) opened for business in the groovy, cool, fab and bellbottomed days of 1970, when I was still just a bit too young for a chopper bicycle. It came through our letterbox every Saturday, and was an essential grounding in interesting facts and "world knowledge" in the days before Wikipedia, and – decades before Facebook – its international penpals page was popular. The *WoW* of the early 1970s allowed itself occasional flights of futurology – giant walking cities on telescopic legs and an illustration of the (then) fantasy of a proposed "Channel Tunnel", its entrance spiralling into the ground like a helter-skelter.

World of Wonder (not to be confused with an earlier, American, *World of Wonder* magazine from the 1930s) was published by Fleetway, a division of magazines giant IPC. Although it would appear somewhat worthy in tone by today's standards – its pages often ended up being cut up for school geography projects – what made *WoW* really cool was a regular feature called 'Strange Stories'. The editors might have been a little embarrassed by 'Strange Stories' – it only ever had two cover spots in its entire 258-issue, five-year run. Possibly they were worried that parents would disapprove of such in-your-face, delinquent areas of study as yetis, lighthouse-threatening giant octopuses, the Oak Island Money Pit or similar degeneracy appearing on the front of the magazine. 'Strange Stories' galloped through all the old fortean chestnuts – and some less well known forteana since forgotten – in three sumptuously illustrated pages or less, and packaged

IT PACKAGED HIGH STRANGENESS IN EASILY DIGESTIBLE PORTIONS FOR BRITISH CHILDREN



anomalous phenomena and high strangeness in easily digestible portions for the children of Britain, the Commonwealth and (in translation) Holland.

'Strange Stories' must have been the crucial factor that set a number of latter-day forteans on the path of the odd. Canadian Nick Van der Graaf, for example, reminiscing on the 26pigs.com website, writes: "In *WoW*, I first heard of Kaspar Hauser, I first read about Spring-heeled Jack, all kinds of exciting and mysterious phenomena. To this day (I'm 38 now), I regret losing those marvellous magazines. I think they were a great influence on me."

ILLUSTRATING THE UNKNOWN

And then there were the pictures! The technology of the time meant it was easier and cheaper to pay illustrators (there were a lot more of them around then) than to source and clear rights for photos. *WoW* even had an occasional series called "Up and about with our colour camera" in which they showcased the groovy but still rather fiddly technology of colour photographic printing. All 'Strange Stories' illustrations were painted by hand. For some reason, probably also to do with the printing processes of the time, they were usually in a strange two-colour palette of blues and greys. Sea serpents, giant squid and octopuses seemed a firm favourite for the *WoW* illustrators, sometimes rendered in spectacular colour, deep green seas and all.

Some 'Strange Stories' illustrations scared the living daylights out of me. I'm still haunted by a traumatic formative experience, turning the pages of *WoW* 164 and being confronted with a graphic rendering of one of the many hallucinations that afflicted the inhabitants of the town of Pont Saint Esprit, France, in 1951. The illustration showed a resident opening the door to a doctor on a house call – but in place of the doctor's face there was a skull beneath his hat! 'Strange Stories' identified ergotism, possibly caused by mould on the local flour, as the cause of the hallucinations, rather than any alleged CIA plot to lace the water supply with LSD (**FT262:20–21**), further noting that villagers saw "processions of historical ghosts", pets went "berserk", and that it all started after the priest noticed the arm on the village's statue of the Virgin Mary was missing.

Some 'Strange Stories' illustrations were downright baffling. No explanation was given as to why (in *WoW* 61) Alexander Selkirk – the inspiration for Robinson Crusoe – was depicted surrounded by cats on his discovery by sailors on a Pacific Island.

The illustrators brought in to work on *WoW* were among the best of the best. Many had come from IPC's more established sister publication *Look & Learn*. Dozens of illustrators worked on the magazine, often (like some of its editors) deliberately recruited from the world of comics in an attempt to give some often quite dry history and science features a look that would engage the kids. Some artists were imported from Spain and Italy. Among the home-grown British illustration talent was Leslie C Caswell, a Royal Academy member and World War II artist who served in Burma. He illustrated *Women's Own* in the 1950s and became well known as a medical illustrator, before working for *WoW*, where he depicted Father Dominic Dechaux levitating over King Philip II's startled Spanish court for a feature on levitators, part of an occasionally fortean sister series to 'Strange Stories' called 'Talking Point'.

Other *WoW* illustrators included Angus McBride and Richard Hook, who later went on to illustrate numerous Osprey 'Men at Arms' books on uniforms from obscure ancient and mediæval wars. For assignments illustrating 18th-century feats of derring-do, preferably involving three-cornered hats, dashing highwaymen and chases on horseback, Cecil Lane Doughty, veteran of *Eagle* comic, was the illustrator of choice. For the numerous *WoW* stories on Spitfires, Concorde and other cool planes, there was aviation specialist Wilfred Hardy, who went on to design the 2009 series of Icelandic 'legendary animal' cryptozoology stamps, featured in **FT251:18**.

SCEPTICISM AND SCAMS

Fantastic though the images accompanying 'Strange Stories' and 'Talking Point' were, the accompanying texts were brutally sceptical for a readership of such a tender age.

'Strange Stories' scepticism ran to dismissing UFOs as weather balloons, unusual clouds and – four decades before they were a fashionable explanation – Chinese lanterns (*WoW* 61). *WoW* 5 wondered, "Was there a King Arthur?" while *WoW* 119 asked, "Rope trick or tall story?" *WoW* 124 speculated that the Cottingley Fairies photos might be fakes at a time when many were still giving them the benefit of the doubt. *WoW* 105 announced: "The end of the world is cancelled" – written in 1972, it jokingly identified 1977 as the next predicted Armageddon.

WoW 163 bluntly concluded that one sighting of the bunyip – Australia's large mystery animal – was just a misidentified musk duck. *WoW* 142 examined the Cheyenne chief Roman Nose's magical invulnerability to bullets, as long as he observed the taboo of starving himself before battle. He survived several horses being shot from under him, before finally succumbing to a shot fired by the US Army at a raid at Republican River, Colorado, having forgotten to forgo food that day. 'Strange Stories' was of the starkly rational opinion that the sudden contemporary introduction of repeater rifles might have been the real cause of the failure of Roman Nose's magic.

For a publication that set itself the mission of introducing kids to what was supposed to be a world of "wonder", such take-no-prisoners scepticism aimed at a young and innocent audience seems almost cruel. (I suspect that the powers behind 'Strange Stories' counted on nine-year-olds simply ignoring the dull and rational explanation at the end, and remaining convinced that UFOs or giant skeletons in Mexico were undoubtedly real – I know I did.

Hoaxes were a common theme, especially those pulled by professed alchemists. 'Strange Stories' told you all a child needs to know about history's great scams. The very first 'Strange Stories' from *WoW* issue 1 was Piltdown Man. *WoW* 68 featured Monsieur Lenoine, "the man who made diamonds" and swindled diamond magnate Julius De Beers, who hired a conjurer to expose him. *WoW* 70 had the fake Shakespeare play *Vortigen and Rowena*, written by William Henry at the age of 18, and sold to producer Samuel Ireland. The illustration showed the play being booed off the London stage on its first performance in 1795.

History's great con artists – like Perkin Warbeck, who led a rebellion against Henry VII of England after convincing many that he was the younger of the Princes in the Tower – rubbed shoulders with altogether more curious narratives of hoaxers and forgers. The German Otto Wacher (*WoW* 252) was imprisoned in the 1920s for forging Van Goghs. Except that some experts pointed out that Wacher couldn't paint, and these experts came to the conclusion that Wacher had obtained 'real' Van Goghs, which the artist had painted in a new, later style.

"Complex fraud" doesn't get much more complex than Alves Reis, the hoaxer featured in *WoW* 53's 'Strange Stories'. How nine- and 10-year-olds were supposed to be able to follow even a summary of Reis's byzantine plot is unclear. Reis faked an authorisation to banknote printers Waterlow in London to print a special issue of £1 million-worth of high-denomination Portuguese escudo notes for him, for some reason overprinted with the word 'Angola' – then a Portuguese colony – and introduced these notes into circulation in Portugal. He started his own bank and was doing well until people spotted there were "too many" such notes circulating. After riots, bank runs and all the governors of the Bank of Portugal being imprisoned, Reis himself got 20 years in 1925.

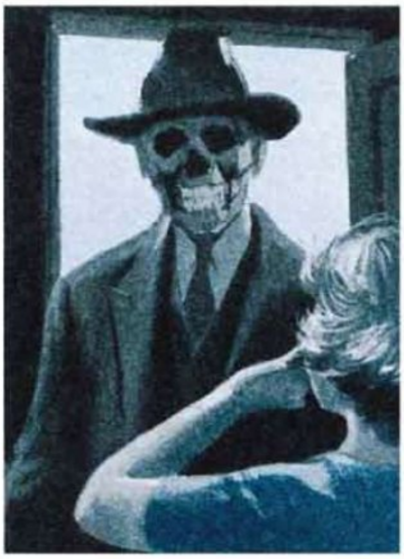
CRIMINALS AND CURSES

Then there was archæology, 'Strange Stories' style. *WoW* 21 asked, "Who were the yellow long-armed giants?" When the Dutch "discovered" Easter Island in 1722, this was how the islanders described to them the builders of the celebrated statues, whom they referred to only as "the others". Then there was the discovery of lost Nestorian scriptures found shredded in a mouse's nest in a cave in

Mongolia in the 1940s, as the Communists closed in. *WoW* 186 covered a 13ft (4m)-tall human skeleton discovered in Peru and buildings apparently constructed by giants in Mexico (and see **FT256:58–59** for the 'Strange Stories' take on the archæological mystery of the 'Dorak Treasure' allegedly dug up in Turkey, only to then disappear, if it had ever existed.)

The perpetrators featured in *FT*'s own occasional round-ups from the annals of odd crime would have been put to shame by 'Strange Stories' spectacular narratives of criminal derring-do. These included, in *WoW* 45, James Andrews, a Union officer in the American Civil War, who specialised in stealing trains from behind Confederate lines. *WoW* 206 covered Robert Redru, the French detective who (allegedly) shopped himself after discovering that he himself was a somnambulist murderer, and was sentenced to spending his nights in prison until his death in 1939. American gangster Robert James Pitts (*WoW* 235) had his fingerprints surgically removed, only to find that after fingerprinting following a random police stop in Texas, the smudges where there should have been fingerprints fingered him more than ever, making him "the most marked man in America".

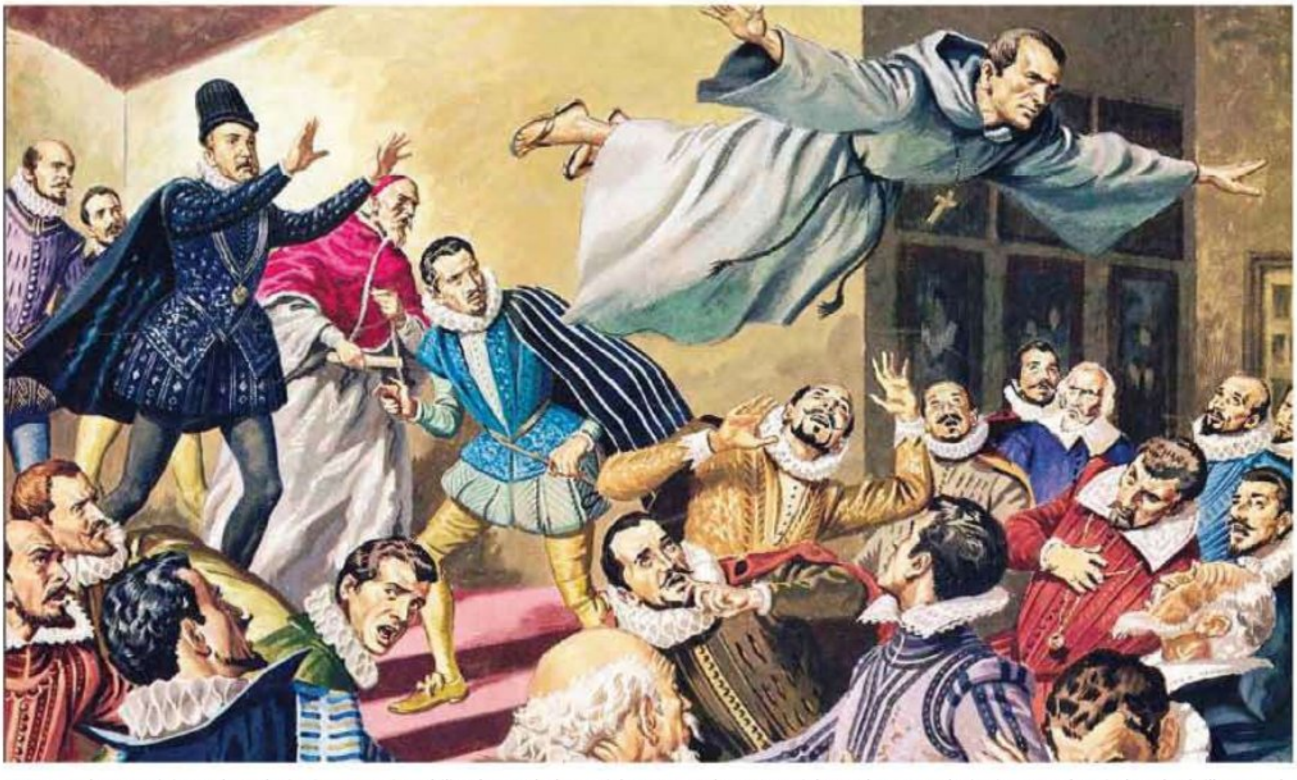
Stranger still was the obsessive Vicenzo Perrugia (*WoW* 100), who somehow seems to have stolen the Mona Lisa from the Louvre in 1911, then tipped off a dealer that he had it in his "dingy flat in Florence", whence it was recovered two years later, leading to speculation that Perrugia had been paid by the Italian government for this odd art heist. In the dashing highwaymen (and women) department, we find (in *WoW* 48) celebrated Edinburgh 'female highwayman' Grizel Cochran, who reached her criminal peak in 1685, while another Edinburgh resident who made it into the 'Strange Stories' annals of extraordinary crime was Deacon Brodie, mild-mannered Edinburgh city councillor by day, highwayman by night, and apparently the inspiration for *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.



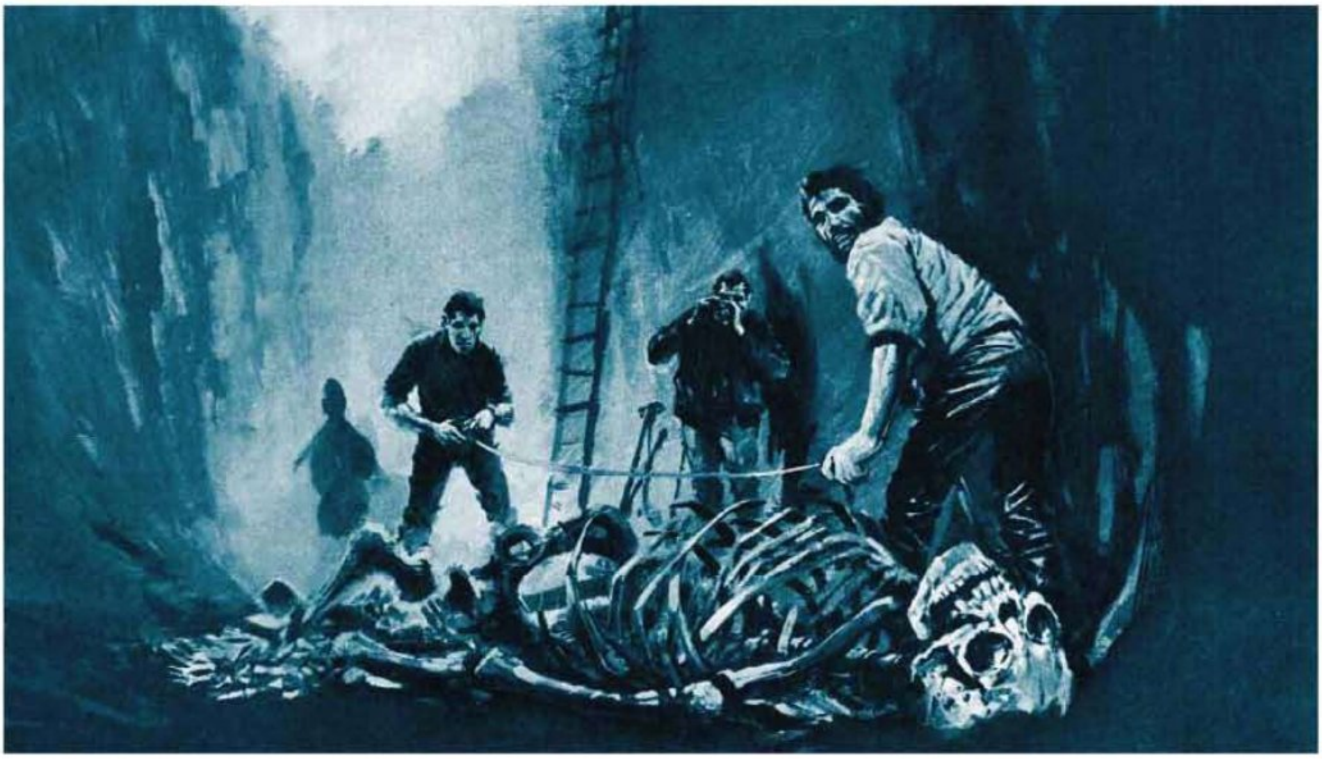
IT CONCLUDED THAT A SIGHTING OF A BUNYIP WAS JUST A MISIDENTIFIED DUCK

Eccentrics – especially Irish eccentrics – were another favourite theme to which 'Strange Stories' often returned. Most paled into insignificance when compared to amateur mountaineer Maurice Wilson, who froze to death after deliberately crashing a plane into the slopes of Mount Everest as part of his solo attempt to climb it in 1933 (*WoW* 99). Other differently-lifestyled subjects were Rudolph Raspe (*WoW* 72), creator of *Baron Munchausen*, and himself almost as weird as his creation. A scholar, geologist, compulsive fraudster and thief, Raspe fled from Germany to Cornwall, where he worked in a tin mine assay office before fleeing again to Ireland. Then there was Irishwoman Dervla Murphy, showcased in *WoW* 198. She is best known for her solo 1963 cycle ride to India, highlights of which included being stoned during a religious riot and held by Afghan bandits. Also definitely on the unusual end of the spectrum was tall, blonde Jack Metcalf (*WoW* 67), point-to-point racing champion of Knaresborough, horse taxi driver in Harrogate, captured by Bonnie Prince Charlie's army in 1745 while fiddling for the English at the battle of Culloden, surveyor and builder of the Harrogate to Boroughbridge road, and blind since the age of six.

And what would a fortean series for kids be without some curses? There was Valentino's silver ring, (*WoW* 10) which is now somewhere in a bank vault, having brought misfortune to so many of its wearers. There was Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria's 'cursed' car (*WoW* 98) that killed many of its owners, and in which the Archduke was being driven during his fateful visit to Sarejevo in June 1914. And there was the suspiciously unlucky "cursed" Hispania



ABOVE: Father Dominic Dechaux levitating over King Philip II's startled Spanish court, and **LEFT:** Daniel Dunglas Home levitating out of a window; both illustrated by Leslie Caswell for the 'Talking Point' article "The Men that Gravity Forgot" in *WoW 51*. **TOP:** A terrifying hallucination at Pont Saint Esprit, France, in *WoW 164*.



ABOVE: Italian archæologists uncover a 13ft-tall human skeleton in Peru, from the 'Strange Stories' article "When Men Walked Tall" in *WoW* 186.

9th Legion of the Roman Army (*WoW* 25), almost wiped out by 'Boadicea' (Boudicca) in her rebellion of AD 79, and which then disappeared North of Hadrian's wall 20 years later. The legion's eagle standard – minus its wings – was found discreetly buried under a villa in Silchester.

WEIRD WARFARE

Although *WoW* styled itself as "the magazine for every boy and girl", it was rather skewed in favour of 'Strange Stories' from the annals of war, especially WWII, which still loomed large in the playgrounds of the 1970s. One such military-flavoured entry was that of Arthur Sandeman, who – inspired by Tennyson's *The Charge of the Light Brigade* – joined the Central Indian Light Horse in the 1930s. When this unit mechanised in 1941, he transferred to the last remaining front-line British unit that actually still used horses, the Burma Frontier Force, and fulfilled his destiny with a last cavalry charge "into the jaws of death" that ended in a massacre during the defence of Taungoo airfield against the Japanese (*WoW* 241). Other unusual soldiers in the war against Japan were the 'Hughies', the Hong Kong Volunteer Corps, whose spirited defence of Hong Kong's power station against the Japanese was commemorated in *WoW* 253's 'Strange Stories'. Many of the 'Hughies' were in their 70s; some were Boer War veterans.

Another curious episode from the annals of military history was that of the *USS Arakine* (*WoW* 175). The ship was patrolling the coast of South America just after the American Civil War when it was lifted by a tidal wave two miles (3.2km) inland onto Chilean soil. The *Arakine* had run out of cannonballs, so its crew fought off Chilean looters by firing hard cheeses from its cannons. (Or did it? The incident has the feel of one of those tall tales made up in the great tradition of 19th-century American local newspapers, and an Internet search didn't turn up any ships of that name. Can any *FT* readers shed light on this?)

Another of the 'Strange Stories' in time of war was France's 'Black Legion' of 1,500 convicts in captured British uniforms dyed black (they actually turned out a rather nasty brown, on account of the base colour of the British 'redcoats' they had used). They were sent by a desperate revolutionary French government in 1797 to cause panic in Britain. Commanded by Colonel William Tate, a 70-year-old exiled American mercenary, they got blind drunk on their voyage to Britain and were depicted in an illustration in *WoW* 24, on the deck of one of their warships waving bottles in the air. Landing at Fishguard, South Wales, they were beaten back by one Jemima Nichols with her pitchfork, and surrendered to the militia, mistaking the Welsh ladies' tall hats for the headgear of the brigade of guards.

In the back of the car on the morning school run, there would be intense rivalry between *WoW* subscribers and those kids who took IPC's larger format, better-selling, brasher sister publication *Look & Learn*, which tended to have more illustrations of speedboats and Spitfires, returned to the 'Great Trek' of the South African Boers with suspicious frequency, and had the beautifully illustrated Roman-Empire-in-a-parallel-universe science fantasy strip 'The Trigan Empire'. But, crucially, it didn't have anything like 'Strange Stories'. We *WoW* readers pitied the *Look & Learn* readers, who didn't believe my reports about the 13ft (4m)-tall skeletons of Peruvian giants. The *Look & Learn* readers probably ended up growing up more normal as a result. The joke was on us *WoW* readers, however. As we will see in part two (next issue), *Look and Learn* eventually swallowed up *WoW* (as it did seven other publications during its 20-year-reign) and brought to an end the Golden Age of our beloved 'Strange Stories'. FT

FURTHER READING

For illustrator Leslie C Caswell, see The Gerry Anderson complete comic history: http://tinyurl.com/3xopfmq (technodelic.pwp) and The Soham Grammarian: http://tinyurl.com/33mla6z (sohamgrammar.org.uk).

Works by illustrator Cecil Doughty: http://tinyurl.com/33vf5tt (bookpalace.com).

Iceland cryptozoology stamps series by *World of Wonder* illustrator Wilfred Hardy: http://tinyurl.com/2uk9nm9 (topoftheworld.nu).

Works by illustrator Angus McBride: http://tinyurl.com/2veldp9 (bookpalace.com).

Official *Look & Learn* website: www.lookandlearn.com.

The Bumper Book of Look and Learn, selected by Stephen Pickles, Century/Random House, 2007.

World of Wonder bibliography: http://tinyurl.com/35uoqz9 (26pigs.com).

World of Wonder is held in the British Library serials collection (http://catalogue.bl.uk), shelf mark P.993/58. The *Fortean Times* office holds a complete bound set of *World of Wonder*.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

MATT SALUSBURY is news and features editor of English language teaching trade paper *English Language Gazette*, an activist with the National Union of Journalists and a regular *FT* contributor.

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The Fortean Times Random Dictionary of the Damned

compiled by the Hierophant's Apprentice

No 37: CONTACTEE RELIGIONS

We noted in the last entry that both the Space Brothers of the 1950s and the grey aliens of 1990s abductions were, by and large, doom merchants, although their approaches to the horrors they foresaw for humanity were rather different. Like many people on Earth, the Space Brothers were concerned about the dire consequences of nuclear weapons. Forty-odd years later, like many people on Earth, the aliens were warning of environmental collapse and/or cataclysmic natural disasters; and as the year 2000 approached, the upheavals they appeared to predict became ever more severe. While the Space Brothers indicated ways we could avoid the collapse of civilisation as we knew it, the Greys simply seemed to be passing a note marked indifferently "FYI" and leaving it at that. Space Brothers, who carefully insisted on their religious credentials, were millenary prophets. Whereas, regardless of the expectations of Christian fundamentalists, the Greys were heralds of a singularly unattractive, secular apocalypse.

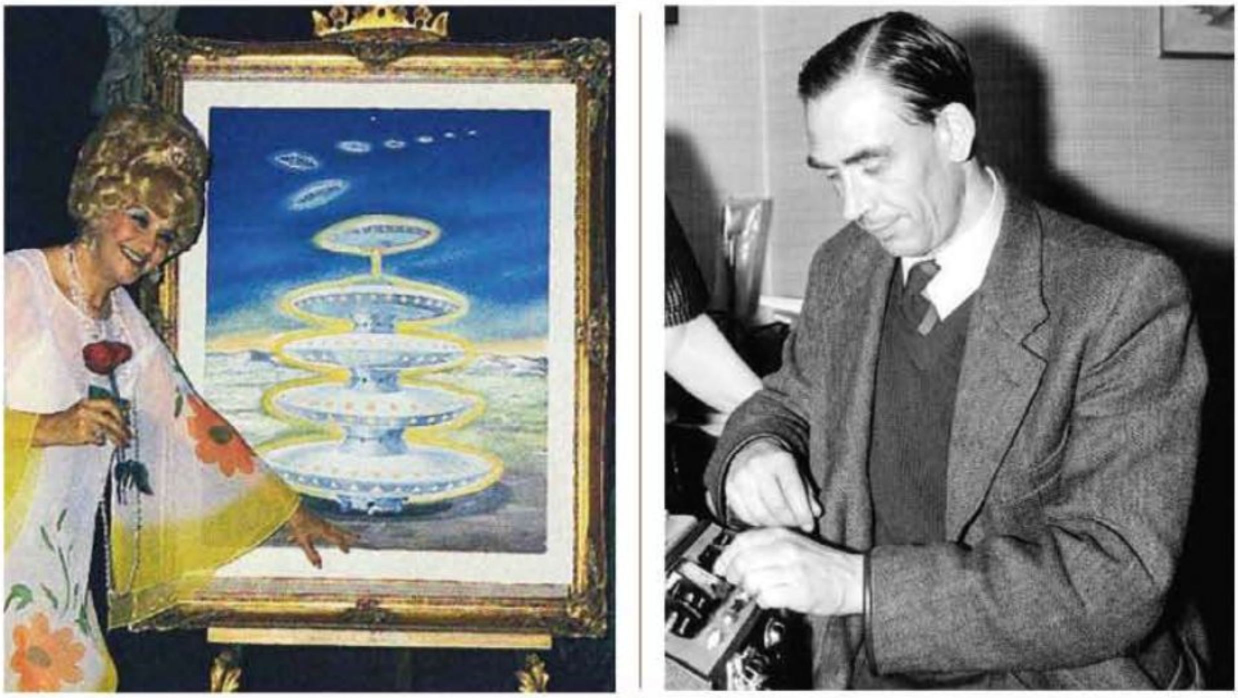
SPACED BROTHERS: The Confederation of Planets according to Unarius.

GETTY IMAGES / NEWSMAKERS / DAVID McNEW

To clarify the distinction: an apocalyptic thinker is a gloom-monger, focusing on the tribulation, pain and destruction that precede the glories of the new millennium – which in any case, the legend went, would be entirely to the advantage of the Greys, who were going to interbreed with us and save their sickly race from extinction. A millenary overlooks the agonies of the cosmic rebirth, or omits it from his scheme of things, and simply looks forward optimistically to a new golden age of peace, joy, plenty, and glorious weather. Which sunny future, so like the kind of paradise described in Sunday schools, was ours for the having if we but listened to the Space Brothers. Like gods – or angels – the Space Brothers were watching us, and warning us, and would lock us out of Paradise if we didn't behave. And if we didn't behave we'd destroy the Earth.

The contactees were the most conspicuous manifestation up till then of an underlying religious potential in ufology and, more particularly, of the field's incipient, secular paranoia. With the genius of hindsight, this oft-remarked religious tendency among contactees is no longer surprising, given the background of the granddaddy of them all, George Adamski (**FT160:49**). We are unlikely now to know the degree of sincerity with which in the 1930s 'Professor' Adamski printed a business card describing him as "Speaker and Teacher of Universal Laws and the Founder of Universal Progressive Christianity, Royal Order of Tibet and the monastery at Laguna Beach". Gareth Medway[1] writes:

> *From what is known of his teachings, they bore no resemblance to either Christianity or Tibetan religion, e.g. "Universe means not just our solar system but space without circumference in which dwell billions of our solar systems. The Royal Order of Tibet is interested only in revealing what is thought to be mysteries so that they may be used practically in the present field of life where man may understand*



TOPFOTO

SAUCER HEADS: Contactee cult leaders Ruth Marian/Norman (above left) of Unarius and George King, founder of the Aetherius Society.

his fellow man by understanding the laws which rule all creatures, thereby awakening from the dream-life to the reality which leads to Mastery. It is an Order based on the highest and the simplest teachings in the field of Mastery…" It is evident that, even if he himself had not quite Mastered English grammar, he had Mastery of the art of using many grand words without thereby conveying any meaning.

In such meaning as there was, the knowledgeable eye might have detected some debt to Theosophy, but easing the lot of mankind in this vale of tears seems to have involved other means besides "revealing mysteries". Ray Stanford recalled how in 1958, as a devoted 15-year-old follower, he visited Adamski. Who, having drink taken, revealed: "The Prohibition was a good thing for me, boys. You're too young to know about it, but hell, they outlawed the liquor all over the country. Hell, I got the Royal Order of Tibet – all incorporated and everything! I got the special license – for religious purposes I can make the wine. Gottdammit! Hell, I made enough wine for all of Southern California! I was making a fortune. Then that man Roosevelt, he knock out the Prohibition. Hell, if it hadn't been for that gottdammed man Roosevelt – I wouldn't had to get into this saucer crap." [2]

Naturally this does not cast any of Adamski's later claims in a terribly good light, even if they weren't absurd. Which is not to say that an embracing fondness for wine, profit and metaphysical exploration are either immoral or incompatible.

THE POWER OF PRAYER

It did not take long for others to see the chance for profit and at least the appearance of metaphysical exploration in contacteeism. One of the longest-lived sects to have seen the religious potential in UFOs is undoubtedly the Aetherius Society (see **FT104:49; 270:38**). Founded in 1955 by a (then) London taxi-driver, George King, it reportedly arose from an experience that would have had most people maintaining a lifelong nervous silence. In May 1954, King said, he was alone in his Maida Vale flat when he heard a voice in his ear proclaim: "Prepare yourself! You are to become the voice of Interplanetary Parliament."

King took this startling news with commendable equanimity. Eight days later, "an Indian swami of world renown" (whom King declined to name) teleported himself to King's flat and instructed him further in his mission, particularly in how to achieve telepathic contact with a being from Venus called Aetherius. Proclaiming that "[S]pace aliens hold the key to the salvation both of the planet as a whole and of every individual on Earth," King set up his Society (a church in all but name) as interest grew in his accounts of subsequent telepathic contacts with Aetherius, whose wisdom was "relayed over millions of miles of etheric space".

In an early book, King claimed to have made out-of-the-body journeys to Mars and Venus. On his very first trip, he managed to survive an encounter on Mars with a hostile dwarf armed with a ray-gun and, as in all good swords-sorcery-and-sandals tales, was promptly recruited by the Martians to combat a sentient asteroid "the size of the British Isles" that was attacking their space fleet. When the Martians' best military efforts failed, King himself – who else – led a final 'death or glory' assault and vanquished the object with a "weapon of love".

One of the Aetherius Society's major projects was charging 'prayer batteries', which were placed on the tops of 19 very high mountains, mostly in remote parts of the world, and allegedly store up to 700 hours' worth of spiritual energy for 10,000 years. To juice them up, Aetherians form a circle and chant mantras for hours on end. Various other operations involving amassing or beaming 'spiritual energy' were said to have averted wars, prevented catastrophic earthquakes, and so on.

This is all probably innocuous enough, but one wonders if King's followers would have been quite so willing to struggle up mountains had they been aware of another version of how enlightenment came to him. In *Flying Saucerers* (Alternative Albion, 2007, p74), David Clarke and Andy Roberts relay a quaint eyewitness account from historian Laurens Otter. In early 1954, a drunken taxi driver entered a meeting at the anarchist Malatesta Club in Soho, and asked for Sam Cash, a fellow cabbie. Learning that Cash was expected later, "…the tired and emotional taxi driver lay down across some chairs and promptly fell asleep." At the end of the guest speaker's talk, the chairman asked if there were any questions. Whereupon,

> *…the taxi driver suddenly woke, asking, 'How do I make a million pounds?'. Robinson [the chairman] took the question in good humour and speculated the best way to make a fortune was to found a fake religion. A discussion about how best to do this ensued with Otter opining that a much better idea would be to get in on the flying saucer craze. Robinson concurred, suggesting that the two ideas could be combined for best effect. […] A few years later, Cash told Otter that the drunken taxi driver, whose name was George King, had taken his advice about melding religion with flying saucers, and it had worked. The rest, as they say, is history.*

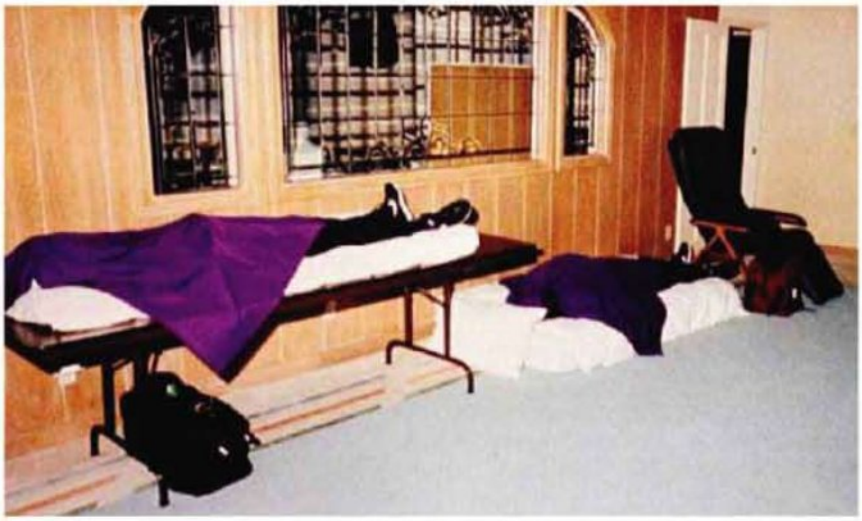
Naturally, the Aetherius Society disputes this version of events.

CHANNELS OF REINCARNATION

Like Adamski, King claimed to have met, on occasion, the beings he channelled, but overtly prophetic-cum-religious UFO cults have tended to rely more on utterances received in trance than on taking minutes of meetings. Vying with the Aetherians for the title of world's oldest millenary UFO sect is the Unarius Academy of Science, founded by Ruth Marian and Ernest L Norman in 1954 (see **FT158:28–33**). Both were devout believers in reincarnation. In previous existences, Ruth had been (among others) an extraterrestrial, the Egyptian slave girl who discovered baby Moses floating in his basket, Confucius, Socrates, Mona Lisa [*sic*], Henry VIII, and Mary Magdalene. Ernest, originally landing from outer space on Atlantis – in time to see it destroyed – had been Pharaoh Amenhotep IV and Jesus of Nazareth. Which pretty much settled their career in the 20th century, channelling the wisdom of the Space Brothers as well as such earthly luminaries as Mozart, Pavlov, Tesla and Robert Oppenheimer.

'Unarius' is an acronym for Universal Articulate Interdimensional Understanding of Science. To followers, Ruth (now Norman) was known as Uriel, or Universal Radiant Infinite Eternal Light. Over the years, she adopted such titles as the Universal Seeress, Healing Archangel, Spirit of Beauty, Goddess of Love, and Cosmic Generator. Her more prosaic neighbours in El Cajon, California, were unimpressed, and referred to her simply as 'Spaceship Ruthie'.

Of the two, Ernest was the main channel until his death in 1971. As Jerome Clark describes it (*UFO Encyclopedia*, 2nd Edition 1998, p942) space people spoke through him "of their mission to redeem the Earth, a troubled planet in which those who have committed great wrongs on other worlds are dumped to work off their karmic debt. Unarius followers are encouraged… to prepare for imminent landings by space beings, at which time the Earth will become the 33rd planet in the Interplanetary Confederation." Clark quotes a Unarius spokeswoman as saying in 1997: "Worldwide, there is substantial agreement that humankind is being prepared for a momentous change in consciousness, which will affect all institutions on Earth, as we come to the end of the sixth cycle of the precessional in the year 2000." Sadly, Ruth Norman died in 1996 and did not live to see these things come to pass. But then those of us who survived the millennium did not see them reported in *The Times* either. Of course, the news may have been covered up by the Illuminati and their ubiquitous, omnipotent agents.



IN TRANSITION: Heaven's Gaters, bags packed for the trip, travelled to the 'next level' via suicide.

CORBIS / REUTERS

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR

"Sincerely deluded but essentially harmless" seems a fair way to describe Unarius and its adherents, but not all millenary contactees have had happy endings. A case in point is Gloria Lee-Byrd, the founder of the Cosmon Research Foundation, which had 2,000 members at its peak. Previously a follower of Oahspe – "A New Bible in the Words of Jehovih and His Angel Ambassadors" transmitted via automatic writing to New York dentist John Bailou Newbrough and published in 1882 – Lee-Byrd made telepathic contact in 1953 with an ET known as 'JW', a resident of Jupiter. His teachings appeared in *Why We Are Here*, published in 1959, and Lee-Byrd became a regular on the contactee circuit. Under JW's guidance, Lee-Byrd produced a design for a space ship. She attempted to present the blueprints to government officials in Washington DC in September 1962, along with a warning that the space people – concerned as ever about atomic weaponry – were about to land on Earth and impose their own plans for peace on the world. Turned away by the bureaucrats, Lee-Byrd declared a hunger strike until they agreed to meet her, but omitted to inform either the press or the officials, who failed to turn up. After 66 days without solid food, she was taken to hospital, where she died in early December.

The most notorious of grim endings for a millenary contactee group was the suicide of 39 members of Heaven's Gate in San Diego, in 1997 (see **FT99:4, 32; 100:4, 34–41**). Founded in the mid 1970s as Human Individual Metamorphosis by Marshall Applewhite and Bonnie Lu Nettles, *alias* Bo and Peep, the cult promised that members would undergo a transition from this world to the "next level" by being beamed up to a flying saucer. The catch was that this involved first dying then being resurrected in a new body; the attraction, perhaps, was that those transformed would be an elect, a chosen few. Those left behind would be destroyed as the Earth was "recycled – 'spaded under'". A major part of the "overcoming process" or preparation for the transition was a fairly extreme asceticism; the group segregated itself from the world as much as possible. In 1997, it was put about by parties on the more unhinged fringe of ufology that a giant UFO was tracking Comet Hale-Bopp, itself an unexpected visitor to the Solar System. Applewhite (Nettles had died in 1985 of cancer) got news of this via the Internet and decided that this was the craft they had all been waiting for; and that suicide – actually carried out in three shifts – was the way to translate to it.

Ufological religions are associated with the 1950s, but the phenomenon is by no means dead. There is certainly a cult, if not a religion, surrounding the claims of Billy Meier and his contacts with 'Pleiadeians' and his connection to the *Talmud Jmmanuel*, a 'gospel' that supposedly predates the canonical synoptic ones; and many a prophecy is still to be had from Ashtar, first channelled by contactee George van Tassel in 1952. One of the odder, and creepier, of current groups is the neo-Nazi, Marcionist Tempelhofgesellschaft (THG), whose younger branch is based in Vienna. According to them, Jesus of Nazareth was not Jewish (surprise) but Aryan; and the Aryan 'race' came to Atlantis from a planet of Aldebaran. By some hidden logic, they maintain that because Aryans are extraterrestrial, they have divine licence to dominate the world. The THG credo includes the belief that a vast horde of spaceships from Aldebaran is on its way here and, on arrival, will join forces with Nazi flying saucers from bases in Antarctica to establish an Aryan empire in the West.

Where are you George King and Spaceship Ruthie, just when we need you?

NOTES

1 Gareth J Medway: "Beyond the Reality Barrier", *Magonia* 94, Jan 2007. The essay is an excellent introduction to the occult background of many contactees of a cultish/religiose persuasion.

2 Medway, *loc. cit.*, quoting Adamski as reported by Douglas Curran, *In Advance of the Landing: Folk Concepts of Outer Space*, Abbeville Press, New York, 1985, p72.

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The right royal relic?

On 30 January, modern-day supporters of King Charles I will gather in Whitehall to commemorate the 'martyrdom' of a monarch. As TED HARRISON explains, among the relics left by 'Saint' Charles are no fewer than three execution shirts – but which blood-spattered garment is the genuine article?

TED HARRISON is a former BBC religious affairs correspondent, long-time *FT* contributor and author of many books, including *Diana: Making of a Saint* (2007).

At the moment his bloody head was raised to public view after his execution, Charles I became, to his supporters, King Charles the Martyr. There was an immediate clamour for holy relics. Some objects, such as his gloves and insignia had been handed to friends on the scaffold, but many in the crowd just wanted a sample of the blood to treasure and revere.

Defeated as he was politically and militarily, the king sensed that martyrdom was the monarchy's best long-term hope of survival. Shortly before he died, he declared he would be exchanging a "corruptible for an incorruptible crown".

The parliamentarians knew that regicide was a political necessity, but a risky option. If the monarch truly was the representative of God on Earth, as the Stuarts argued, then to kill the anointed king was a gross act of blasphemy. They risked not just the wrath of the people, but eternal damnation.

Charles's execution took place on 30 January 1649. Within days, his supporters began promoting his martyrdom by publishing a book reputedly written by the king himself. *Eikon Basilike* was both a political tract and a book of pious prayers. It became an instant bestseller.

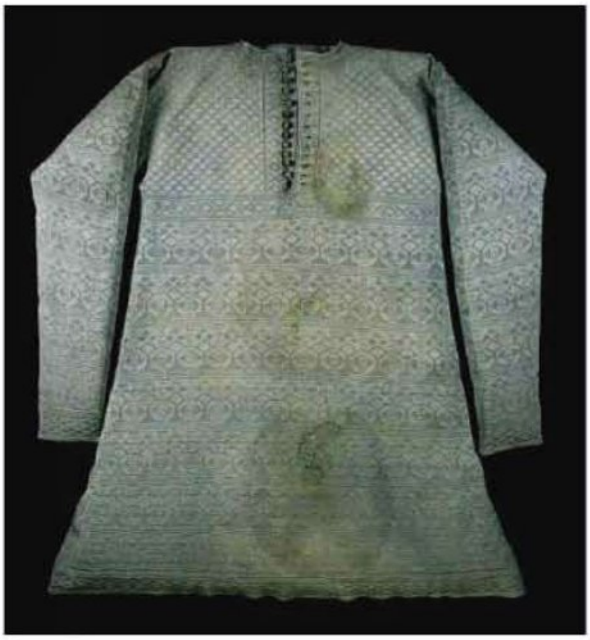
Eleven years later, when Charles's son was restored to the throne as Charles II, the cult had such a strong hold that several churches were dedicated to 'Saint Charles the Martyr'. Even today, Charles I's Feast Day is still observed on 30 January, when the Society of King Charles the Martyr celebrates an Anglican High Mass inside Whitehall's Banqueting House and mementos of the 'Saint' are placed on view.

There are a number of relics still extant, including the king's gloves, at Lambeth Palace, and, at Longleat in Wiltshire, the doublet he wore, but removed before his execution.

But of all of them, the most revered must surely be his shirt. It was not only an article of clothing worn by the king on the fateful day, but also soaked in his blood.

Three different garments have claims to be the genuine and sacred article. The Royal Collection has one, bought in good faith by Edward VII from a descendant of Charles's Lord Chancellor. But in 1999 an expert dress historian established that, far from it being a shirt from an execution, it was a lady's chemise as might have been worn at the time under a tight-fitting bodice.

The Museum of London has another. This is certainly a gentleman's garment, but more of an elaborately crafted waistcoat than a shirt. Records show it came into the possession of the king's physician, Dr Hobbs, after the execution. He passed it on to his daughter Susannah. It was sold in 1898, and again in 1925, before being presented to the museum. Although the garment has stains on it, police forensic tests carried out in 1989 could not confirm them to be blood. However, the museum points out that the bloodshed might have been minimal, as the beheading was achieved with a clean blow. Also, photographs of the garment from the 1898 sale show the stains more clearly than current pictures do.



ABOVE: The shirt held by the Museum of London, bloodstains visible, if somewhat faded.

© MUSEUM OF LONDON

Unlike the shirt at the museum, the third claimant is not on public view. A few years ago, I was allowed to see it, but specifically asked not to identify the location. I can say, however, that it is at a Sussex address and I have held the treasured relic in my (gloved) hands. I was told apologetically that it had once been bloodier – but that a zealous laundry maid had washed it two centuries ago.

The shirt used to be on public display at Ashburnham Church in Sussex. Horsfield's 1836 History of Sussex records the shirt, along with the king's silken drawers and his watch, being preserved in a glass case lined with red velvet. "Long were they treasured up as precious relics," Horsfield observed, and reported rumours that the relics had healing properties if touched.

The shirt's authenticity has never been questioned. John Ashburnham, whose descendants owned the estate, had been one of the king's confidants. When the estate was sold last century, the shirt was retained by the family – who own it to this day.

So which shirt is genuine?

30 January 1649 was a bitter winter's day. The king was worried that in the cold he might shiver, and reportedly said: "Let me have a shirt on more than ordinary by reason the season is so sharp as probably may make mee shake, which some Observors will imagin' proceeds from fear. I will have no such Imputation, I fear not death!"

It's likely, then, that the king wore the Sussex shirt underneath and the Museum of London waistcoat on top. As the Museum says of its exhibit, "this kind of garment was presumably worn for warmth over a fine linen shirt."

So both garments, it would seem, are true relics of the king and martyr. FT

Dangerous crossing

One-time Osaka resident **JOHN BILLINGSLEY** looks regretfully back at the passing of a haunting Japanese jingle that once played at pedestrian crossings, evoking childhood fears associated with a Shinto rite of passage.

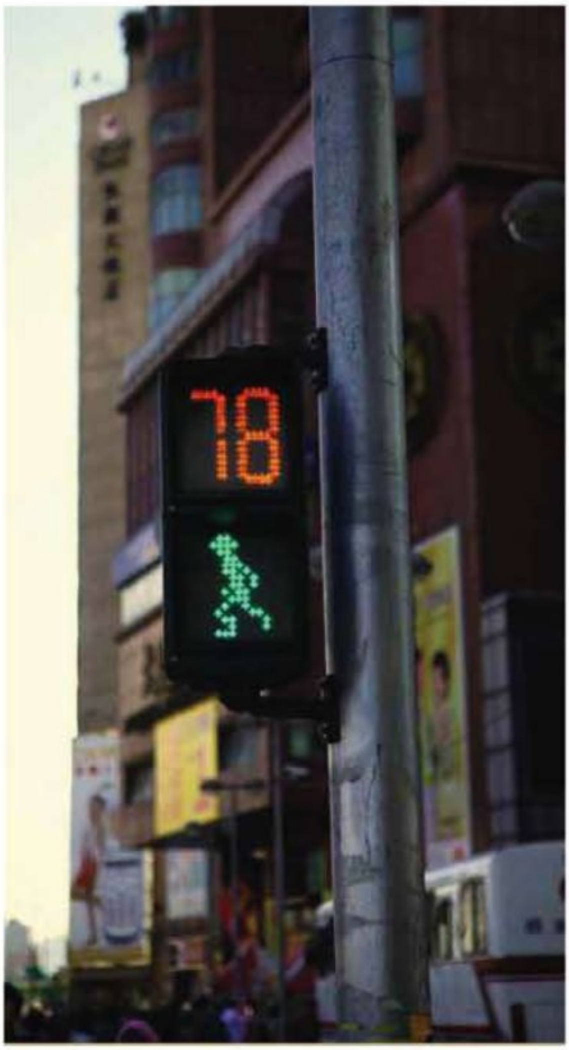
JOHN BILLINGSLEY has written several books on the history and folklore of West Yorkshire and articles on similar topics relating to Japan. He edits leading earth mysteries journal *Northern Earth.*

Visitors to Japan between the mid-1970s and mid-2000s may recall a curious melody that used to accompany the 'green man' at some pedestrian crossings – I can still hear it echoing in my head from the time I used to cross the road by Osaka Station on my way to work in the 1980s.

It's a while since I heard it, though. On a return visit in September 2005, crossing the same road, I noticed something was different, and it took a while to work out what that was. The melody had gone, and it's probable it will never be heard again. That's because it has been replaced throughout Osaka Prefecture by two-tone bird-like bleeps: *kakko* or *pyo-pyo*. Groups representing those with vision difficulties say the bird-like sounds make it easier for them to discern where the sound is coming from, and thus make crossing the road safer. But is that the real reason?

The missing song is known as *Toryanse*, and is a 19th-century folk and children's game rhyme describing a visit to a Shinto shrine. The song is thought to originate in Saitama Prefecture and to refer to Miyoshino Shrine in the precincts of Kawagoe Castle (oddly, however, the song's words and dialect suggest an origin closer to Osaka). In 1921, composer Motoori Nagayo set the words to a tune from an early 20th-century song popular in the Tokyo area. *Toryanse* was one of two songs chosen in 1975 as street-crossing melodies (the other was *Kokyo no Sora* – the same tune as the Scottish song *Comin' Thro' the Rye*); aptly enough, as the song conveys a sense of having to get somewhere within a limited period.

The children's game also known as *toryanse* is similar to other children's games known in the West, such as 'London Bridge'. It involves two children forming a 'gate' with their upraised arms, under which other children pass; when the song ends abruptly, the 'gate' closes, capturing the child beneath. The caught child then replaces one of the gatekeepers. But the song's minor key melody and opaque lyrics evoke a rather more threatening atmosphere.



ALAMY / MODERN IMAGES LIMITED

ABOVE: A typical Japanese street crossing.

The melody is gone, and it's probable it will never be heard again

The words – *Toryanse, toryanse, koko wa doko no hosomichi ja, Tenjin-sama no hosomichi-ja, chitto toshite kudashanse…* – tell of a mother and daughter setting out on a journey to a shrine in the castle grounds, where the girl will be presented on her seventh birthday. This places the song in the annual calendar to 15 November and a specific Shinto festival, the *shichi-go-san*. In general, it evokes a pleasant enough scene, although the two have a narrow path (*hosomichi*) to follow: not just the path through the sacred gateways (*torii*) that straddle the approach to the shrine, but also through the castle gate and its guards. Here the words *chitto toshite kudashanse* – "please won't you let us pass?" – come in. The mother explains – *kono ko no nanatsu no iwai ni ofuda osameni mairimasu* – that they're going to the shrine to bequeath the shrine talisman (*ofuda*), to mark the little girl's seventh year. They are allowed through, but not without a warning. Going there may be easy (*iki wa yoi, yoi…*), but it is at this point that the melody changes to a higher register, and a note of tension creeps in. *Iki wa yoi, yoi, kaeri wa kowai – kowai nagara mo toryanse…* The return journey (*kaeri*) is fearful (*kowai*), and the rather dour melody enhances this. But why should the coming back be any less pleasant than the going?

The *shichi-go-san* (7-5-3) festival is a ceremony in which girls of three and seven years of age, and boys of three and five, are taken to their local Shinto shrine by their parents. The children are dressed in their finest – often traditional, and always quasi-adult, clothes. The object is to present them to the local tutelary *kami* – a Japanese word inclusively encompassing deity, spirit, numen and other related English terms – and pray for their continued health and safe upbringing. In effect, it is also to let the *kami* know that the parents are looking after their offspring properly and preparing them for their adult roles (hence the quasi-adult clothing), thus contributing to the health and harmony of the local community. As the *kami* shares responsibility for the community's wellbeing, a harmonious relationship between humans and *kami* (and thus their environment) is essential.

There is some disagreement as to whether boys of three were traditionally included in this observance. Some sources, such as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, state that only girls of three years are taken to their shrine. However, general custom today allows boys and girls equality in two shrine visits each (at three and five and three and seven respectively), and this may have historical resonance. In the mediæval period, both boys and girls up to three years old had their heads shaved; at three, their hair was allowed to grow. Boys received their first *hakama* (formal male trousers) at five, while girls began tying their kimono with the adult-type *obi* sash, rather than with cords.

Indeed, it was thought that up to the age of seven, when the ceremonial presentations to the *kami* cease, children 'belonged' to the *kami*; after the final presentation, they became 'little men' and 'little women', fully part of the human community and, as the clothing and nicknames imply, on the road to the responsibilities of adulthood. One function of this belief may well have been to ease the pain of all-too-frequent infant death through the idea that the young child was still 'subject to recall'. This attitude also no doubt underlies both the indulgence afforded to young children in Japan and the commitment to beginning their creative education at an early age; in later stages of childhood, things get tougher, and in the teenage years the educational pressure on Japanese adolescents has regrettably often led to violent outbursts and adjustment problems in schools, even teenage suicides.

The 7-5-3 custom, particularly the final presentation, is clearly a rite of passage in which children finally leave their intermediate status between the otherworld of the *kami* and the human world, and move from protected childhood to the first vulnerable stage of maturity. Girls in particular have been in that halfway status for seven years. As with most traditional rites of passage, especially those signifying stages of maturity, there is an element of anxiety in the transitional period. Part of this anxiety is in the formality and enforced stillness of the Shinto blessing ceremony that would accompany the shrine visit, but part is tied up with the imminent changes that the child, in earlier times, would have learned to expect.

Is this related to the *kaeri wa kowai* anxiety of the return journey? Some, trying to explain the lyric, have suggested that seven-year-old girls were once sacrificed on an altar within the shrine, but as well as there being no evidence for this, the practice would seem unthinkable in the Shinto context, where blood constitutes a serious pollution of the sacred precincts. A more likely explanation would be that, as a child of the *kami* prior to her final presentation at the shrine, the girl would be under the *kami*'s protection on her way there – but on her way back, she would be as liable as any other member of the community to the usual hazards of life. Are the castle guards warning her of the vulnerability of young girls to abuse from males? Is it an implied threat from the guards themselves, of teasing on her way back home? Or of some more official form of harassment? Indeed, as a girl in a patriarchal society where arranged marriages, including childhood betrothals, were commonplace, she would perhaps be likely to receive a ruder awakening to the demands of society than she might expect. Or is it just another way of expressing the tension of the rite of passage?

GETTY IMAGES / AFP / YOSHIKAZU TSUNO

ABOVE: Young girls attend the *schichi-go-san* (7-5-3) festival, all dressed up in their kimonos, complete with 'grown up' *obi* sashes.

The 7-5-3 custom is clearly a rite of passage

I thought Japanese adults might share my nostalgic sense of loss, but even those in whom familiarity had not bred unawareness of the melody and its folk roots were equivocal about the change of policy. Some hadn't noticed its absence until I pointed it out – it takes a stranger to bring you news of home, according to one Japanese saying – and others, thinking over the words of the old song, agreed that it was a bit frightening, a morbid sort of tune. Perhaps planting the idea of frightening journeys home in people's minds outside a train station wasn't so clever (this response may have been exaggerated by a recent railway accident in the Osaka region, in which a train on an elevated curve left the tracks at speed and ploughed into an apartment building, with several fatalities). Some suggested that it was the psychological import of the half-forgotten words and the potential traumatisation of young minds, rather than any sort of lobby pressure, that lay behind the decision of the central government in 2003 to replace all crossing melodies – but then, who knows?

From my point of view, if it hadn't been for the change of tune I might never have learned about the song and its mysterious connotations, whatever they might originally have meant. But I will miss the idiosyncrasy of the Osaka street crossings. A few *toryanse* hung on in Aomori, Yamagata and Yamanashi Prefectures for a while, but by 2008 all crossings had switched to electronic chirrups – and now we'll never know just how dangerous the journey home might be... FT

Return of the king

Dr KARL SHUKER wonders whether there might be pictorial evidence for the presence of the mysterious king cheetah in the Asia of the Mughal emperors.

Dr KARL SHUKER is a regular *FT* columnist and the author of many books on cryptozoology and other fortean topics. His latest book is a collection of poems, *Star Seeds and Other Dreams* (CFZ, 2009).

A number of previously undescribed animals could have come to the attention of zoologists a lot sooner had they paid more attention to historical and ancient iconography, which contain accurate representations of species such as Grévy's zebra, the giraffe-necked gazelle, and even the giant panda, dating back centuries before these animals' official scientific discovery. Now, another exciting and highly unexpected example may be awaiting confirmation, featuring one of the world's most iconic and exotic wild cats – the king cheetah.

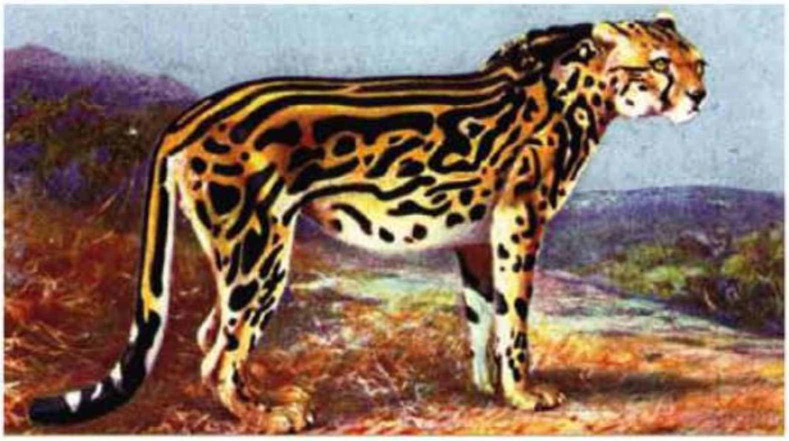
Once upon a time, cheetahs were comfortingly predictable in overall appearance. Whether they came from Africa or Asia, their pale yellow fur was always patterned with black polka dots. End of story – until 1926, when a remarkable pelt came to light in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) – originating from a strange, unidentified cat trapped at Macheke, and which locals claimed was a bizarre beast known to them as the *nsuifisi* or hyaena-leopard. Hitherto dismissed by science as a native myth, this elusive creature supposedly resembled a big cat in overall shape but was patterned with the bold black striping of a hyaena – a description that perfectly matched the mysterious pelt from Macheke. Ornately adorned with spectacular stripes, swirls, and blotches, a series of heavy rings around the tail, and bold longitudinal stripes running along the entire length of the cat's back, as well as sporting an exceptionally profuse mane on its neck, it was shown by zoological examination to be a cheetah pelt, but dramatically different in appearance from the familiar polka-dot variety hitherto known.

Combining its regal appearance with its leonine mane, British Museum (Natural History) zoologist Reginald I Pocock designated the Macheke pelt as the type specimen of a brand-new species, which in 1927 he formally christened *Acinonyx rex* – the king cheetah. In subsequent years, other king cheetah skins were obtained in Zimbabwe and also in neighbouring South Africa and Botswana, but these showed great variation, with some clearly intermediate between the Macheke specimen and normal spotted cheetahs. Consequently, the king cheetah was eventually downgraded in taxonomic status from a valid species in its own right to a mere variety of the spotted cheetah, becoming *Acinonyx jubatus* var. *rex*.

This demotion was fully vindicated in 1986 when a study by cheetah researchers Dr RJ van Aarde and Ann van Dyck revealed that the king cheetah's striped pelage was due to a single gene allele (form) – specifically, a recessive mutant allele probably directly equivalent to the allele responsible for the blotched tabby coat pattern in the domestic cat. Moreover, king cheetahs have nowadays even been bred in captivity from normal spotted parents, confirming that it is not a separate species.

The pelt came from a strange cat trapped in Rhodesia

BELOW: A 1927 painting of the king cheetah, based upon the Macheke skin of 1926.



Taxonomic considerations aside, however, what makes the king cheetah so memorable in addition to its incredibly beautiful coat is its extremely limited distribution. Many freak mutations of coat colour or patterning in mammals are spontaneous, i.e. they can arise abruptly in any population of a given species, regardless of geographical location. Yet whereas the typical spotted cheetah occurs in southern, eastern, central, northern, and western Africa, king cheetahs have never been reported conclusively outside southern Africa – except for a single West African specimen shot in 1988 by a poacher in Burkina Faso's Singou Total Fauna Reserve. Today, moreover, even normal cheetahs are rare in West Africa, and are rarer still outside Africa – but this was not always the case.

The cheetah once existed in the Middle East and southwest Asia too, most notably in India, where it was commonly used as a hunting beast by the Mughal (Mogul) emperors during the 16th to 19th centuries. Today, conversely, this once-abundant Asian subspecies, *Acinonyx jubatus venaticus*, is known to survive only in Iran and possibly also Pakistan (the last three Indian specimens were shot in 1947), with probably fewer than 100 specimens alive. In addition, there are a few highly elusive small-spotted cheetahs reported from Egypt's Qattara region, whose exact taxonomic identity remains uncertain.

Yet in view of spontaneous mutations (explaining the lone West African king cheetah), could it be that back in the centuries when Asian cheetahs were still very common, especially in India, a striped specimen was born there from time to time? Until now, there has never been any evidence for the erstwhile existence of Asian king cheetahs, but that may soon change – thanks to the following potentially significant information. In October 2010, a cryptozoological colleague (who has asked to remain anonymous until he has completed his field investigations) was discussing cheetahs with me online when he casually mentioned that his Asian ancestors used to keep king cheetahs along with normal cheetahs, and that they were housed in specially constructed kennels and used for hunting game. When I pointed out that king cheetahs have never been recorded from anywhere in Asia, my friend very politely but firmly disagreed with me, stating:

"I have seen paintings of the Mughal Emperors on hunting excursions being led by Cheetah and King Cheetah. The Cheetahs were used to lead their masters to big game. What is strange is that some of these beautiful animals are depicted in these paintings as having beautiful coats decorated with ornate patterning of blotches, swirls, bars, longitudinal stripes down its back and a thick banding around its tail, not sure about the mane though. I am absolutely certain it wasn't an Asian Cheetah."

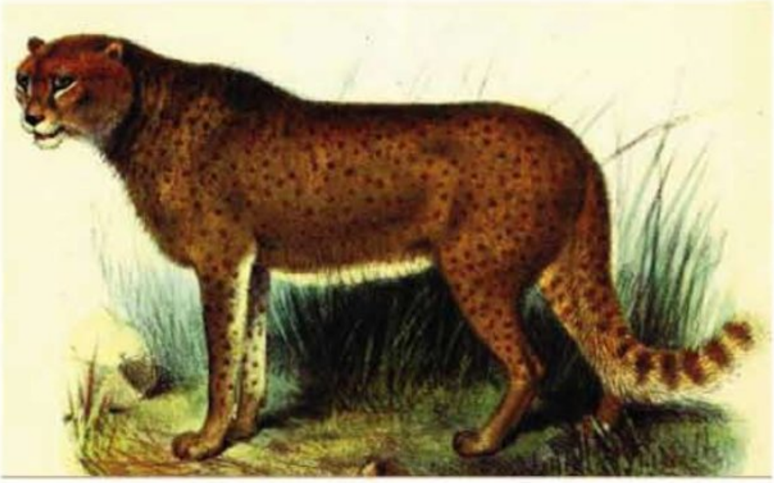
Needless to say, I was very startled and excited to read this, bearing in mind that my friend had provided a perfect description of a *bona fide* king cheetah. So I asked him if he could send me any specific details concerning the paintings in question, and when or where he saw them. He then provided me with the following tantalising recollections:

"[It was in] 1995, I was 11 years old, this was at Dubai airport, on route from Pakistan. I asked the shopkeeper and he told me that it was a depiction of the Mughal emperors and their cheetahs, I was particularly captivated by the cheetah at the centre of the image. It had as I described earlier stripes, swirls and was clearly different from the other cheetahs in the painting. Last year, I found a similar image on Wikipeda. They have since taken it down… I've tried googling it, but to no avail."

I've spent several hours in Dubai International Airport on a number of occasions, and can well recall shops there selling all manner of artwork. Having said that, I've never yet seen anything depicting a king cheetah-like cat, but it is an extremely big airport, with an enormous and very rapid turnover of stock. However, there is still hope that iconographical evidence supporting the onetime existence of Asian king cheetahs may yet turn up. Spurred on by the realisation of just how significant his sightings of the above-noted paintings may be, my friend is keen to pursue the matter further, at a promising source:

"I can try and see what I can find at the local art bazaars and antique stalls. There are plenty in Islamabad alone, and the Sindh area has plenty of art stalls selling paintings, copies of paintings and antiques from the Mughal era."

I wish him success, and await with interest any news – and, in particular, any paintings! – he may obtain.



ABOVE: A colour engraving from 1877 of the woolly cheetah at London Zoo.

Certainly, the cheetah has a well-attested history for yielding unexpected, aberrant variations upon the normal polka-dotted theme. In 1877, for example, a decidedly bizarre cheetah was exhibited alive at London Zoo, having been captured in Beaufort West, South Africa. Its fur was brown instead of pale yellow, its spots were dark red instead of black, it lacked the normal cheetah's familiar pair of facial 'tear' stripes, and its fur was so fluffy that it became known as the woolly cheetah, and was formally classed as a separate species by Zoological Society of London secretary Philip L Sclater, who duly dubbed it *Felis* [=*Acinonyx*] *lanea*. During the next few years, two other specimens were documented, both from Beaufort West again, but none has ever been reported since. Today, this controversial mystery cat is deemed to have been either an erythristic (freak red) variety or (less likely) a partially albinistic variety of the normal cheetah species.

At least two melanistic (all-black) cheetahs have also been reported. One was sighted in 1925 by HF Stoneham in Kenya's Trans-Nzoia District, the other in Zambia by well-respected naturalist and author Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald, who observed it in the company of a normal spotted cheetah.

In 1921, six years before he examined the first scientifically recorded king cheetah skin, Pocock had documented a particularly strange cheetah pelt that even today remains unique, wholly unlike any other specimen recorded before or since. Shot in Tanganyika (now Tanzania) by Lt Col WT Gregg of the King's African Rifles, its mane was remarkably sparse and its spots exceptionally small, little more than speckles and freckles.

Interestingly, another sizeable African cat that normally has large spots, the serval *Leptailurus serval*, occasionally gives rise to a freak non-taxonomic variety in which the spots are mere speckles, and sometimes so small as to give the impression that the cat is unspotted. This speckled variety of serval, once erroneously thought to be a separate species, is known as the servaline. So I hereby propose that the cheetah counterpart documented by Pocock in 1921 should be officially termed a cheetaline.

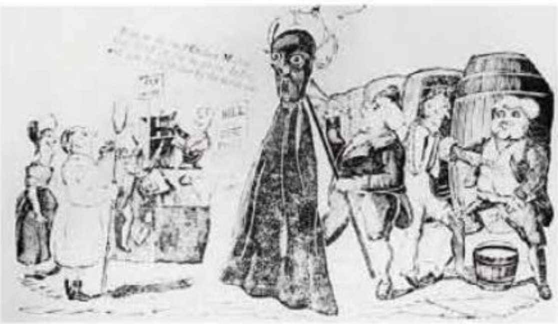
Undoubtedly the most exotic cheetah of all, however, rivalling even the king cheetah itself in terms of sheer unadulterated beauty, must surely have been the extraordinary specimen brought by Raja Bir Singh Deo in 1608 to the Mughal emperor-naturalist Jahangir (ruled 1605–1627) at Agra. For according to Jahangir's own documented description of it, this wonderful animal had bluish-white fur and blue spots! Some researchers have suggested that perhaps this spectacular felid was not a cheetah at all, but a snow leopard *Uncia uncia*. However, the short-limbed snow leopard bears scant resemblance to the long-limbed cheetah form, and Jahangir was a very experienced naturalist who was hardly likely to confuse these two very different cats. In reality, his blue-spotted white cheetah was most probably a partial (chinchilla) albino.

It is a delicious irony, given the existence of all of these fully confirmed genetic mutants, that the cheetah actually exhibits a conspicuously low overall degree of genetic variation – much lower, for instance, than that of the lion, tiger, or leopard. Nevertheless, it clearly exhibits sufficient morphologically expressed genetic variation to throw up a number of surprises from time to time. And perhaps these also include a king cheetah or two in Mughal India. Alternatively, it may be that they were simply brought from Africa to India by travelling merchants or explorers rather than arising there by spontaneous mutation. Whatever their origin, if the former existence of king cheetahs in Mughal India has indeed been portrayed in paintings, and any of these paintings can be uncovered, this will be a momentous cryptozoological discovery – marking a most unexpected return of the king to its spotted predecessors' Asian homeland of long ago. FT

Cholera humbug!

The world was shocked when the cholera outbreak in Haiti in late 2010 led to anti-UN riots and the spread of conspiracy theories. But, as **GEOFF DUPUY-HOLDER** points out, we've been here before, and closer to home...

GEOFF DUPUY-HOLDER is the author of 17 fortean-themed books, including *The Guide to Mysterious Glasgow* and *Scottish Bodysnatchers: A Gazetteer.* He lives in Scotland.



ABOVE: A cartoon from *The Weekly Show-up or Political, Satirical & General Humourist*, 21 July 1832. A man marches through London with an effigy, blaming the recent cholera epidemic on immigrants from India. Meanwhile, in the background, a quack sells medicine to gullible passers-by.

GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE

On 16 November 2010, news broke that people in disaster-struck Haiti were rioting against UN Peacekeepers and medical workers, preventing the latter from dealing with a major outbreak of cholera. The rioters believed the disease had been brought into their country by the Nepalese troops of MINUSTAH, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (the Nepalese were later cleared of the smear). By impeding the aid workers, the riots were actually causing more people to die of the disease.

We've been here before. When Asiatic cholera first attacked Britain in 1831–32, riots broke out in several urban areas, the targets being doctors, who were frequently prevented from attending to the sick. Typical was the scene in March 1832 in the Gorbals area of Glasgow: “The mob pelted the medical men with mud and stones, shouting, “medical murderer!” “cholera humbug!” and “Burkers!” [1] Liverpool suffered no less than eight anti-medical riots between 29 May and 10 June 1832. [2]

The primary cause was a fear of body snatching. The Burke and Hare trial of 1828, and the continuing work of the ‘resurrection men’, had annihilated working-class faith in the medical profession. It was widely believed that, with graveyards now well protected by watchmen, doctors were seeking alternative ways to harvest corpses for dissection. The obvious method was to poison drinking water with cholera. On 26 March 1832, body-snatching tools were discovered at the Moss, a newly constructed cholera burial ground in Paisley. The following day, a mob attacked the Cholera Hospital and every doctor's dwelling in the city, even demolishing the van used to transport the dead. In response, 22 Paisley doctors resigned their positions at the Hospital, and refused to care for any further cholera cases. Conflation between body snatching and cholera was also at the heart of the Liverpool riots.

> **“The mob pelted the medical men with stones”**

Conflict could also erupt from ethnic or religious tensions. The official regulations on disposal of the dead were designed to prevent contagion, and typically involved wrapping the corpse tightly in linen, then a speedy burial close to the Cholera Hospital via a hurried open-air service. For many Irish Catholics, this violated numerous burial traditions: “The Irish were especially outraged by the improper and hasty burials and they sometimes managed to hold off the authorities when they came to bury the body.” [3]

Meanwhile, evangelicals of various persuasions promulgated the view that the epidemic was divine punishment for the sins of the nation, and Church authorities recommended prayers, fasts and days of public humiliation to placate what RJ Morris called “The God of Cholera”. A much-noted sermon by Thomas Arnold was an attempt by a religious moderate to counter this archaic thinking.

Large posters proclaiming “Cholera Humbug!” were put up in Glasgow and elsewhere, and the phrase was a widespread marker of the belief that the disease was manufactured by the doctors, or did not exist at all. The posters advocated resistance against the cholera laws and the doctors. But who exactly was the source of the humbug depended on your political perspective. Agitation had been intense both for and against the Reform Bill, which would see the extension of the voting franchise and the curtailment of some areas of privilege (it was passed on 4 June 1832). The coincidence of the cholera outbreak occurring in the same timeframe as the debate over Reform brought the two separate issues into alignment: “One party discovered the cause in a movement for the disestablishment of religion. Another considered it was a judgment from God for asking for the Reform Bill. The Radicals proclaimed it to be a trick of the Tories to prevent agitation for reform.” [4] Many reform-minded individuals, such as William Cobbett, the radical pamphleteer, were in no doubt that the “hobgoblin” of cholera was an invention of the Establishment, for typical money-grabbing reasons:

> *CHOLERA HUMBUG! – Inhabitants of Lambeth, be not imposed upon by the villainously false report that the Asiatic Cholera has reached London. A set of half-starved doctors, apothecaries' clerks, and jobbers in the parish funds, have endeavoured to frighten the nation into a lavish expenditure; with the Government they have succeeded in carrying a bill [the Cholera Act] which will afford fine pickings.* [5]

Religious conservatives, political conservatives, political radicals and the disenfranchised alike were united in the belief that the official position was some form of conspiracy or manipulation (sound familiar?). Political forces tried to use the outbreak as a means of pushing their views on the Reform Bill. As a consequence, the medical authorities were often ignored or derided, and those who were working tirelessly to treat the sick and dying were attacked and forced to abandon their patients. By the time the disease had run its course in the winter of 1832, cholera had claimed 52,000 lives.

On 20 November 2010 came news that the demonstrations in Haiti had spread to the capitol, Port-au-Prince, while UN officials were openly suggesting the violence had been politically motivated to disrupt the scheduled elections. Meanwhile, 1,200 people were known to have died of the disease. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.* FT

NOTES

[1] RJ Morris: *Cholera 1832: The Social Response to an Epidemic*, Croom Helm, 1976, p109.

[2] Sean Burrell & Geoffrey V Gill: “The Liverpool Cholera Epidemic of 1832 and Anatomical Dissection – Medical Mistrust and Civil Unrest” in *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, Oct 2005, v60 n4, p478.

[3] AS Wohl: *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain*, Routledge, 1984, p20.

[4] James Napier: *Folk Lore: or Superstitious Beliefs in the West of Scotland within this Century*, Alex. Gardner, Paisley, 1879, p20.

[5] William Cobbett: “Cholera Morbus” in *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register* (25 Feb 1832), v75, n9, p523.

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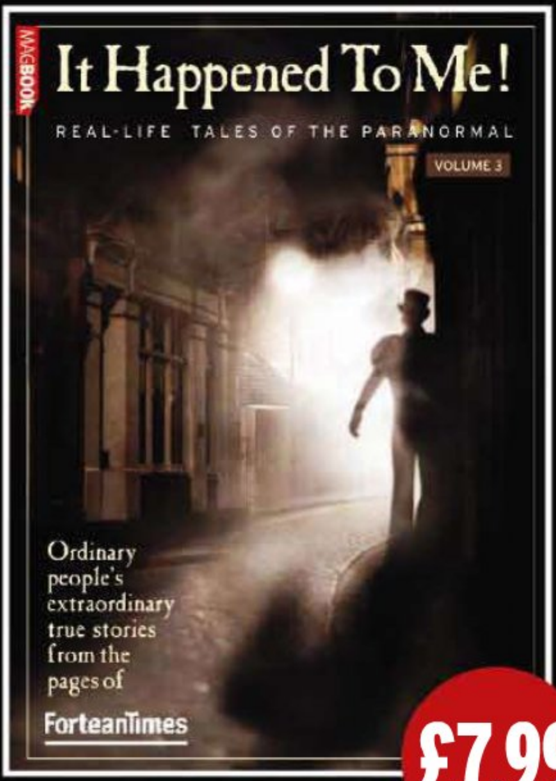
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The boy who stalked the palace

The Boy Jones stands out from the nefarious, lovelorn and loopy characters who became obsessed with Queen Victoria in being keener, really, on Buck House

Queen Victoria's Stalker

The Strange Story of the Boy Jones

Jan Bondeson

Amberley 2010
Hb, 159pp, illus, notes, index, £16.99 ISBN 9781848688836
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.29

In December 1838, staff at Buckingham Palace caught a young intruder, after a chase that wouldn't be amiss in a Keystone Cops film. The intruder didn't plan theft and at his trial, the jury acquitted the trespasser, Edward Jones. Even the judge described his act as "daring folly". But Jones wasn't content to sit at home in his Westminster slum. He sneaked into the palace at least three times – probably, as Bondeson comments, more – and, in December 1840, hid under a couch in the Queen's dressing room.

Not surprisingly, the security lapses proved a political embarrassment and the government decided to get rid of Jones. The Boy Jones gained the dubious distinction of being the final sailor impressed into the Royal Navy and "the last person tried *in camera* by the Privy Council on a charge clearly within the jurisdiction of a magistrate".

Bondeson's description of Jones's exploits is vivid, graphic and well written. His account of Jones's first trial, in particular, is wonderfully humorous and evocative. Yet I feel *Queen Victoria's Stalker* is akin to a starter: delicious, but you still want the three-course meal. And that's a compliment, not a criticism.

For example, Bondeson brilliantly characterises several nefarious, lovelorn and mad characters obsessed with Victoria. John Stockledge, for example, demanded admittance to Windsor Castle as he wanted a wife "and thought the Queen would do very well".

Captain John Goode believed himself the son of George IV and Queen Caroline and, therefore, the lawful king. In court after abusing Victoria in public, Goode admitted he "wanted to tear her to pieces". Indeed, Victoria survived several assassination attempts. Bondeson supplies just enough to leave you wanting to know more about these intriguing characters.

Similarly, his chapter analysing the failures of the government is compelling, but at five pages, it seemed too short. I wanted more of the detail he uses so tellingly, more of his intelligent analysis. Bondeson's a victim of his success: he clearly knows the area and can create vivid, insightful and compelling narrative. I felt time and again that there was a longer book trying to get out. If he realised the full potential of the material, Bondeson could have created a masterpiece.

Bondeson made stalking the book's *leitmotiv*. He claims, for example, that Jones was Victoria's "most persistent admirer… who persecuted her for at least three and a half years". Yet Jones never came face-to-face with the Queen. And Bondeson offers no evidence that Jones followed the Queen elsewhere.

> **"In spite of advances in criminology and psychiatry, the Boy Jones remains unclassifiable"**

Compare Jones's exploits to Thomas Flower, discovered sleeping in a chair in Buckingham Palace's Picture Gallery, just seven yards from the Queen's bedroom, in July 1838. The courts had previously bound Flower over twice for trying to approach the Queen, including attempting to enter her opera box.

However, stalking isn't the only explanation for Jones's repeated visits. Bondeson cites psychiatrist Hubert Norman, who claimed Jones was driven by an obsessional urge to enter Buckingham Palace itself. Reading Bondeson's fascinating book, I tend to agree that the palace rather than the Queen exerted a compulsive allure. (Jones repeatedly expressed a desire – deluded, given his social circumstances – to be an architect.) Victoria herself suggested that Jones "got in more for the fun of the thing than anything else". So was Jones driven by an adolescent's mischief or a stalker's malevolence?

Bondeson's analysis may be right: he makes a compelling case. But to convince me that Jones was a prototypical stalker (a diagnosis that often has sexual connotations), I feel that Bondeson should have spent more time examining the strengths and the weakness of the other theories. I felt, once again, that another book – this time on stalking – was struggling to get out.

We'll never know Jones's motives. Bondeson admits that "in spite of the advances in criminology and psychiatry, the Boy Jones remains unique and unclassifiable".

Finally – using the critic's prerogative to quibble – very occasionally I found the authorial voice slipped. To take one example: Michael Fagan – a latter-day Boy Jones – released a single with punk band the Bollock Brothers. A drunk Fagan once head-butted two other people in a club in, Bondeson says, "true punk fashion". But Fagan was no more a punk than Ronnie Biggs was one for recording with the Sex Pistols. In any case, why the implicit link between punks and violence? The punk gigs I attended regularly around that time were almost always amicable. Incidentally, Bondeson says Fagan performed at the "Bat punk club". I think he means the famous Goth club, the Bat Cave – at least, that's where the Bollock Brothers made their live recordings with Fagan. The occasional slips stand out because Bondeson is usually an admirably careful, precise writer.

Nevertheless, such blemishes certainly don't detract from Bondeson's splendid achievement. Overall, *Queen Victoria's Stalker* is informative and enjoyable, with a wealth of illustrations.

I hope that in these straitened times the price (£17 for around 120 pages of text, excluding notes, index and pictures) doesn't put too many people off this excellent examination of a minor, but fascinating, event in British history.

Mark Greener

Fortean Times Verdict
WELL WORTH READING – PITY IT'S NOT LONGER THOUGH **8**

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Superman's come a long way in the 75 years since his Detective Comics debut

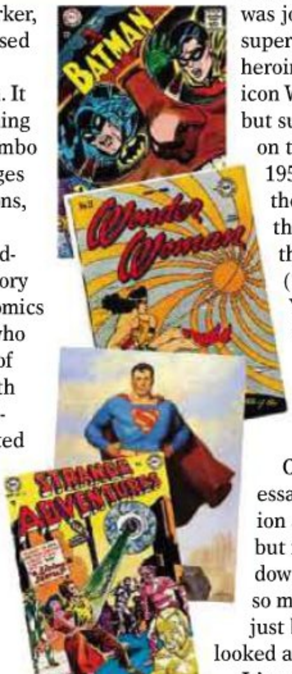
75 Years of DC Comics

The Art of Modern Mythmaking

Paul Levitz

Taschen 2010
Hb, 720pp, illus, ind, £135.00, ISBN 9783836519816

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £121.50



To misquote Dorothy Parker, this book is not to be tossed lightly aside – unless, of course, you're Superman. It comes in at a bone-crushing 15lb (6.8kg), with 720 jumbo pages, thousands of images (covers, inside illustrations, sketches, photographs, movie stills and huge fold-out timelines) and a history of DC Comics's 40,000 comics written by Paul Levitz, who was president for seven of the 35 years he spent with the company. He is a lifelong comics fan who edited *Batman* titles, wrote hundreds of stories and is still involved with the company as a writer, so his account of its history – from pulp to digital publishing – is exhaustive.

The book is divided into seven ages, starting with the Stone Age (up to 1938) and ending with the Modern Age (1998–2010) and an afterword on the digital age.

75 Years of DC Comics celebrates the first issue of *New Fun* in February 1935. Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, a cavalry officer turned pulp writer, set up National Allied Publications. Despite the Depression, he did well for a while, producing, alongside *New Fun*, *Detective Comics*, the DC of the company's eventual name. *Detective Comics* was the home of the first Superman story, though there had previously been newspaper strips. He was joined by more superheroes and a heroine, the feminist icon Wonder Woman, but superheroes were on the wane by the 1950s. Before then, though, they were the good guys in the war effort ("Superman says YOU can slap a Jap with war bonds") against a worryingly effete looking Hitler.

Oh, enough… The essays in each section are a revelation, but it's hard to settle down to them when so many images are just begging to be looked at.

It's gorgeous.

William Darragh

GOTHAM GLOBE
BATMAN BATTLES HOODS
Gotham Gazette
ROBIN ROUTS CROOKS
DAILY PLANET
SUPERMAN SMASHES CRIME RING

Fortean Times Verdict

AN EXTRAVAGANT TREASURE WITH A HEART-STOPPING PRICE TAG **10**

Mystic Cults in Magna Græcia

Eds Giovanni Casadio & Patricia A Johnston

University of Texas Press 2009
Pb, 392pp, illus, bib, notes, ind, £24.99/$35.00,
ISBN 9780292723542

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £21.59

Magna Græcia is, effectively, the area of southern Italy and Sicily that was colonised by the Greeks from about the 7th century BC until the area was absorbed into the evergrowing Roman Empire.

Originating in two symposia held in 2002 and 2004, this book contains a lengthy introduction by the editors discussing the movements and controversies in contemporary studies of the subject, followed by 16 mostly short articles that fall into three main cultic areas: Dionysus and Orpheus; Demeter and Isis; and Mithras.

This is very much the cutting edge of research in ancient religion, and the material is densely academic and highly specialised: one article, for instance, devotes 15 pages to the discussion of two words ('Bacchos', 'Baccheuein') and their meaning in the cult of Orphism, and on occasion there's more wordage to be found in the footnotes than the main text.

Interestingly, there's also a fair amount of academic backstabbing and jockeying for position going on, as authors press the case for their own interpretations over the preceding ones, which provides a certain amount of presumably unintended amusement.

Ranging over both literary sources and archæological discoveries, approaches and writing styles vary from reasonably accessible to drowning in turgid scholarly jargon, but for those willing to hack their way through the academic undergrowth, there's a great deal of interest to be discovered.

Excellently illustrated, but a casual read it's definitely not.

Steve Moore

Fortean Times Verdict

FINE SCHOLARLY RESEARCH, BUT MAINLY FOR THE SPECIALIST **8**

The Truth Agenda

Making Sense of Unexplained Mysteries, Global Cover-Ups and 2012 Prophecies

Andy Thomas

Vital Signs Publishing 2009
Pb, 380pp, illus, bib, refs, indx, appxs, £10.99
ISBN 978-0-9550608-1-6

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.89

One of the admirable qualities of *The Truth Agenda* is the way in which Andy Thomas lays his cards on the table: the book is an ambitious attempt to do exactly what its subtitle proclaims. Part One, containing some adept exposition, surveys the orthodox take on subjects still anything but orthodox, be they conspiracy theories, crop circles, a micro-chipped population, secret societies and the 'Fall and Rise' of David Icke. But *The Truth Agenda* isn't just another bargain bin Mysterious World almanac. It develops a clear arc over the course of its four sections, culminating in what can be seen as a 'truth seeker' call to arms.

Next, Thomas sets out to deconstruct consensus reality, no less. Exhibit A: the Moon landings. Now I will lay *my* cards on the table and say that I am what Thomas would call a 'compromiser'. While I do not disbelieve that the Moon landings happened, I am more than half-convinced that the visual record has been tinkered with, and that NASA, so intent on selling it to the world, ended up making a rod for its own back. Thomas makes a good case for such a scenario here; and reminds us that governments *do* indeed lie to us. Exhibit B furthers this argument by tackling the deception of public and politicians alike over weapons of mass destruction. Then follows Exhibit C: 9/11, posited here as a 'false flag' event of monstrous proportions, with historical precedents to boot.

In Part Three, Thomas covers what he calls 'tools of control': media influence and propaganda, 'dumbing down' in education systems as a form of social engineering, the surveillance society and so on. The 'truth agenda' of the title is what Thomas sees as the necessary response – an ongoing battle to reveal the way things really are.

If the world we are peddled is an erroneous one, the chimerical mask of 'reality' created for us must be stripped away.

Finally, he presents us with the culmination of the book's developing arc: that come 2012, something very big is going to happen, something of global and possibly galactic proportions. As a species, we'll be as mad as ants with their nest kicked over, while things are put into place by a manipulative, shadowy elite to corral us when it happens. Why? So that they are able to pick up the pieces of what is left. Thomas has a point. No sooner has the proverbial levee broken than some of us are looting shops while our fellows are drowning under our very noses.

Ultimately, Thomas's argument is that whether or not anything momentous takes place in 2012 (he acknowledges he'll look pretty silly if it doesn't), we should be acting to alter the dominant, manipulative hegemony anyway, trying to develop a positive global consciousness as opposed to our current memetic one as mere worker ants. We should challenge and question, for simply by virtue of doing so we will ultimately effect global change.

The problem for me – more a cock-up than a conspiracy man – is that this means lying down with some very strange bedfellows. No doubt it's just this outlook which plays into the hands of those, be they Bilderbergers or Illuminati, who wish to divide and conquer by regulating the sort of divisive, self-perpetuating egocentricity shown by folk like me.

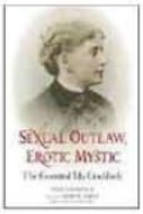
The conspiracy theory tag for *The Truth Agenda* is unavoidable, but Thomas makes a concerted attempt to avoid that reflective, mercury-like quality of so many conspiracy theories, which continually shift position to elude each new rational challenge put before them. With comprehensive notes, links and appendices, this is a useful overview of the current situation regarding some key 'alternative' topics. As for the rest, you must make up your own mind – if, indeed, it *is* your own mind.

Nick Cirkovic

Fortean Times Verdict
AMBITIOUS SURVEY OF ONE MAN'S VERSION OF THE TRUTH **7**

Blithe spirit's missus

Or: how an American stenographer became a sex educator, had erotic relations with a spirit and was arrested for obscenity...



Sexual Outlaw, Erotic Mystic

The Essential Ida Craddock

Vere Chappell

Weiser Books, San Francisco, 2010
Pb, 288pp, $21.95/ £19.99, ISBN 9781578634767
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £19.99

Ida C Craddock was a forthright and extraordinarily brave woman. She was at the forefront of the movement at the turn of the 20th century to educate men and women in sexual matters, yet is little known today. Vere Chappell's valuable effort to present her life, combined with an annotated selection of her writings, should facilitate a long overdue assessment.

Born in Philadelphia in 1857, Craddock began her career as a stenographer. In the late 1880s she became interested in occultism, and read esoteric literature, reading she later put to good use in her own writing, which displays a wide-ranging knowledge drawn from a variety of cultures and periods. In the later 1890s, she became a pioneer in the reform of sexual relationships, and in the provision of advice to married couples.

Craddock wrote pamphlets which outlined her philosophy as applied to marital relations. As well as a frank discussion of the mechanics, there was an emphasis on women's rights and feelings in sexual matters. Her lectures, private consultations and pamphlets were enormously popular, if striking the modern reader as occasionally eccentric.

Craddock provided a three-step programme which paralleled esoteric teaching. She advocated orgasm without ejaculation, which moved sex away from a functional procedure for procreation to one of heightened pleasure and closeness between married couples, and a spiritual act.

The message was a positive one: sex was to be embraced enthusiastically, not ignored, but within a framework of love and mutual respect. Far from being regarded as a crackpot by the medical establishment, despite her lack of medical qualifications she received encouragement from a number of doctors.

Perhaps her most startling assertion was that she had married a spirit called Soph with whom she had a sexual relationship. Clearly the claim was problematic, and she had to fend off criticisms of her mental state, but it allowed her to call herself "Mrs Craddock" (rather than Mrs Soph), which got round the problem of how an unmarried woman could have so much practical knowledge of the sex act in an age when having premarital sex was more worthy of condemnation than having it with a spiritual husband.

To justify this unorthodox relationship, Craddock penned *Heavenly Bridegrooms* (1894). It is a strange book in which she bolsters her claim to have a physical relationship with a spirit husband in a highly detailed treatise showing how common are unions (or "Borderland nuptials" as she calls them) between living and angelic beings, including the Virgin Mary and her "heavenly bridegroom". Aleister Crowley was enthusiastic about Heavenly Bridegrooms and his review is included as an appendix.

Her campaign brought Craddock into conflict with authority, particularly over the issue of sending sexually explicit material through the mail. She was briefly committed to an asylum, and also incarcerated in a workhouse. Eventually, she became tired of having to make compromises in order to continue her crusade. In October 1902, she went on trial accused of sending *The Wedding Night*, which the judge declared obscene, by post. Found guilty, she killed herself the night before she was to be sentenced rather than endure a long prison term.

Craddock has been promoted by the Grand Lodge of the Ordo Templi Orientis (of which Chappell is a member) in the United States because of her occult beliefs, and Chappell's emphasis is more on these aspects of her writings than a concern to place her in the free thought and social purity movements within which she operated.

The OTO has set up a website devoted to her, and hopes to publish more of her work. Additionally, a full biography is promised for early 2011. All these efforts will help further to reinstate Ida Craddock to her rightful place as a pioneer in sex education, one who preferred to pay the ultimate price rather than yield to the forces of social and sexual repression.

Tom Ruffles

Fortean Times Verdict
OVERDUE REAPPRAISAL OF A BARNSTORMING PIONEER **9**

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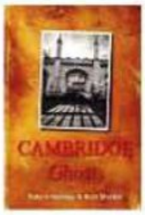
Cantab spook

Ah, for those glory days when students could still ambush ghosts with pistols



Cambridge Ghosts

Robert Halliday & Alan Murdie

Arima
Pb, 127pp, £9.95, ISBN 9781845494537
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.95

"Things are done you'd not believe / At Maddingley on Christmas Eve", wrote Rupert Brooke, himself now a ghost among ghosts. But Alan Murdie and Robert Halliday are a brave duo. The panther man in Peterhouse Walk holds no terrors for them, and they whistle at the bodice-ripping poltergeist of Sawtry. For Cambridge is a ghost-hunter's paradise, the only town in England to boast a Haunted Bookshop (so labelled above the door, in case visitors need a little prompting). The university was the home of MR James, the Ghost Club and the Society for Psychic Research, as well as TC Lethbridge, until he moved on in a huff after doubtful excavations at the goblin-riddled Gogmagogs. His famous theory that ghosts were a psychic residue held in suspension by water vapour seems peculiarly appropriate to the soggy fens. 'Uncanny Visitations Cause Commotion' wrote the *Chronicle* in 1928 after a visit to the Willows, an area of dank marshy scrub with Rackham-esque trees where things were seen at night. At the Pickerel Inn, dangerously close to the water table, a midnight smell of burning opium is all that remains of the two landlords who hanged themselves from the cellar hook and the barmaid who jumped into the Cam.

Suicide is the *leitmotiv* of this book. In 1632, Dr Butts stalked out of Corpus after a stormy committee meeting (they'd booed his Latin play) and hanged himself in a doorway, where he reappears from time to time. Another Fellow had been in the habit of remarking, as he passed a turret in the College grounds, what a splendid place it would be for stringing yourself up – which duly came to pass… The undead dons contrast strangely with the vivacity of ghost-hunting students. No wonder the rule was passed that anyone found seeing a ghost would be sent down.

The famous Cambridge scepticism is not much in evidence here; even an atheist student was converted by the apparition of the dangling Dr Butts. *O si sic omnes!* But the authors' careful research has exposed a number of literary fabrications. 'The Everlasting Club', creepiest of Cambridge ghost stories, has entered folklore despite being made up by the Master of Jesus in 1919, while the tragic Juliet of the Ferryboat Inn (yet another suicide) was fabricated for a 1953 séance, though she goes on rattling the tankards like a good 'un.

One misses the robust methods of the 1690s, when students took on a poltergeist by bursting into the room with pistols; or, indeed, the Victorian ingenuity of the SPR, with their posthumous Cross-Correspondences, a high-minded attempt to continue doing the *Times* crossword beyond the grave. Recent phenomena have failed to live up to these standards, though Sidney Sussex in the 1960s brought horror up-to-date with a disembodied eye that smelled of Spam. The baroque apparitions of yesteryear have given way to little more than domestic dysfunction – tapping noises, flickering lights, shaky doors. Things ain't what they used to be.

Jeremy Harte

Fortean Times Verdict
YOU USED TO GET A BETTER CLASS OF GHOST IN CAMBRIDGE… 10

Wired for God?

The Biology of Spiritual Experience

Charles Foster

Hodder & Stoughton 2010
Pb, notes, illus, ind, 331 pp, £12.99, ISBN 9780340964422
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £11.69

A few chapters in, I decided that this was the most important book I had ever read. I couldn't wait to share that news with the world! A few chapters later, I wondered what all the fuss had been about.

Foster begins with a simple yet bold question: "What are we to make of religious experience?" He warns that's not the same as asking where religious experience is centred in the brain. Instead, he promises that a wide-ranging hunt for understanding will be conducted between the book's covers. Even better, it's written in a thoroughly engaging style.

In the end, though, he keeps coming back to brains and chemistry, and finally says there are no answers. The problem perhaps lies in the title's limiting yes/no thesis: are our nervous systems solely responsible for the creation of spiritual experience? The clear answer is "no," but no alternatives are suggested.

The journey is entertaining. Foster has spats with scientists and researchers, pointing out assumptions and then demolishing them. He looks at altered states of all sorts, including the worldwide history of psychoactive drugs as part of religious experience, near-death and out-of-body experiences, and the overlay of the mechanistic upon experiences that are by definition transcendent. But there are some hoary clichés, too, including Ezekiel's wheel, discovered for the umpteenth time as a possible flying saucer. Meanwhile, obvious avenues for the investigation of the soul are almost completely unexplored; no ESP, no spiritualism, no past lives, no psychical research or ghosts.

Still, it's a bravura display of fortean philosophy, and a fine rebuke of some strands of post-Reformation "science" that is not science at all, but merely faith of a different kind.

The book's engaging and extensive look at the architecture of the brain is itself worth the purchase price.

Jay Rath

Fortean Times Verdict
THE MIND OF GOD VERSUS THE GOD OF THE MIND 8

Getting it wrong

Ten of the Greatest Misreported Stories in American Journalism

W Joseph Campbell

University of California Press 2010
Pb, 269pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £16.95, ISBN 9780520262096
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.26

Books about journalism should interest me – the mass media are important – but they don't. These essays by a professor in a School of Communication are on 'facts' in America media's history which are myths. For example: Woodward and Bernstein, the *Washington Post* journalists, brought down Richard Nixon. Or: when HG Wells's *War of the Worlds* was broadcast in 1938, the masses fled in terror from the invading Martians. Or: the *New York Times* suppressed stories about the Bay of Pigs operation just before it took place.

None of these is true. Nixon was brought down by an army of politicos in Washington; Woodward and Bernstein's prominence is mostly the result of the movie *All the President's Men*. Only a few fled from the Martians; the rest was just exaggeration. The *New York Times* ran its story about the impending invasion of Cuba on the front page. The author re-researches the material and shows how the myth was created. This is mildly interesting. But will it matter to anyone other than students of the media?

Supporting the 192-page text are 54 pages of notes. The author could apply this impressive research effort to related but more substantial questions. For example: why do the American media not report what the Americans are doing abroad?

Robin Ramsay

Fortean Times Verdict
MILDLY INTERESTING BUT IMPRESSIVELY FOOTNOTED 7

SF and fantasy round-up

David V Barrett on a pre-apocalyptic dyslexic wizard, a post-apocalypic girl vs zombies tale, a social worker vs social engineering, a squid god and some Victorian vampires

Spellwright

Blake Charlton

HarperVoyager 2010
Hb, 350pp, £14.99, ISBN 9780007332762
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.49

The Reapers Are the Angels

Alden Bell

Tor 2010
Hb, 304pp, £16.99, ISBN 9780230748644
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.29

Whitehawk

Simon Nolan

Revenge Ink 2010
Pb, 224pp, £7.99, ISBN 9780955807879
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £7.59

Kraken

China Miéville

Pan 2010
Pb, 481pp, £7.99, ISBN 9780330492324
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £7.59

Dracula's Guest

Ed. Michael Sims

Bloomsbury 2010
Hb, 467pp, £18.99, ISBN 9781408808252
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.09

The Wesleyan Anthology of Science Fiction

Ed. Arthur B Evans et al

Wesleyan University Press 2010
Pb, 767pp, £35.95, ISBN 9780819569554
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £32.36

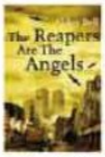
The Pan Book of Horror Stories

Ed. Herbert van Thal

Pan 2010
Pb, 297pp, £7.99, ISBN 9780330518680
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £7.59

Imagine being trained in wizardry, to cast spells – but you can't spell. That's the situation that young spellwright Nicodemus Weal is in. Whenever he writes a spell along his arm before casting it, his spelling mistakes either make the spell unpredictable or nullify it. He also has the problem that he may or may not be the Halcyon, prophesied to prevent an apocalypse, which means that assorted groups of mages and gods are out to get him. This drives the plot; but it's his inability to spell that is the heart of this novel.

Accuracy in writing or speaking spells is nothing new – but I don't recall any author focusing so strongly on the problems of misspelling spells as Blake Charlton does in *Spellwright*. What really brings it home is the information in the blurb that the author has severe dyslexia, could not read fluently until he was 12 – and has since been an English teacher and is now a medical student. His first novel is beautifully written, rich, complex, well-plotted, populated with great characters – and has a wonderfully original take on magic. I know of two other top SF/fantasy writers who have severe dyslexia; maybe there's a link between creative imagination and the determination to overcome a crippling problem.



Post-apocalyptic novels are an SF staple on both sides of the Atlantic. Nuclear war, alien invasion, plague – the causes of social breakdown are endless. There's an interesting cultural comment in that the British ones are usually about people working together to rebuild society (John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*, John Christopher's *The Death of Grass*, Terry Nation's TV drama *Survivors*) and the US ones are usually about a lone person (David Brin's *The Postman*, Michael Swanwick's *In the Drift*, Dean Ing's *Systemic Shock*).

We never learn what caused the devastating change that has hit America in Alden Bell's *The Reapers Are the Angels*, but the effect is that the dead just won't stay dead. The country is full of "meatskins", zombie-like creatures who mindlessly attack and eat the living. Temple – perhaps 16, and a born survivor – finds her problems come not so much from the meatskins as from the people she encounters, most of whom want to screw her or kill her. It's a female twist on survivalist novels, with a feisty heroine who has her own moral code. It largely works, though I found the ending unsatisfying.

Simon Nolan's *Whitehawk* is surreal social realism. It could perhaps be called urban mythology. Mel is a social worker who is recruited by a government project, the Rationality Unit, to take part in a social engineering experiment. Over a few months, she works with a problem family on a sink estate, dealing with their "anti-reason" issues, with "rewards for behavioural and conceptual change". The officialese used by the Rationality Unit is semi-comprehensible and stifling.

Mel is keen and dedicated, but out of her depth. She soon discovers that the ever-fluctuating family is running rings around her: the manipulative father, the agoraphobic mother, the disturbed young teenage daughter, the eight-year-old twins who take it in turns not to speak, plus assorted cousins and other ill-defined occasional inhabitants. Drugs and knives are part of everyday life. But what is it that's repeatedly buried and dug up in the back garden? It's only as the story works towards its climax that it becomes clear that the family has its own rationality, older and darker and more inevitable than anything that Mel and her faceless bureaucratic bosses could ever have envisaged.

Another China Miéville novel, and another winner. *Kraken* begins with the disappearance from the Natural History Museum of a giant squid, complete with display case. How? No one has a clue. Why? A young curator soon finds himself caught up in an increasingly weird world of believers in the squid as a god, villains rooted in the supernatural past and present of London, and the FSRC, the Fundamentalist and Sect-Related Crime Unit, who have their own urban magic techniques. I love the line "London was full of dissident gods" – and the idea that believers in each of these gods are working towards their own apocalypses.

Miéville is an urban writer, and versions of cities, especially London, feature prominently in all his novels. This one is reminiscent in many ways of Kate Griffin's *A Madness of Angels*, which I reviewed here some months ago.

Short stories have always been hugely important in SF, fantasy and horror, and it's a pleasure to be able to give a brief mention to two new anthologies and the welcome reappearance of one old one. *Dracula's Guest* is a superb collection of Victorian vampire stories, from Byron and Polidori up to MR James and Bram Stoker. *The Wesleyan Anthology of Science Fiction* is a mammoth work with 52 stories, both well-known classics and lesser-known works, spanning the history and diversity of the genre; it's been designed as a university teaching resource, with discussion questions and sample syllabuses on a linked website at http://sfanthology.site.wesleyan.edu/.

Finally, it's a delight to see a reprint of a paperback I used to read under my desk as a schoolboy, *The Pan Book of Horror Stories*, the one with the scary cat's face on the cover. It costs a lot more than 3/6 now, but the stories are just as good as they were way back then.

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THE EDITOR, **FORTEAN TIMES**, DENNIS CONSUMER DIVISION,
30 CLEVELAND STREET, LONDON W1T 4JD, UK.

Metropolis

Dir Fritz Lang, Germany 1927
Eureka Entertainment, £22.99/£24.99 (£29.99 combined)

Metropolis: an 84-year-old, 2½-hour long black and white silent movie, with a pretty awful storyline about the conflict between bosses and workers, culminating with the dreadfully naïve moral (later dismissed by Lang as a "fairy tale"), "The mediator between the Head and the Hands must be the Heart".

But visually…

Visually, *Metropolis* is a masterpiece – one of the most astonishing SF films of all time, even surpassing, in terms of the technology of its day, *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

The big story, of course, is that this is the longest version to be available since shortly after the film's première in January 1927, when it was slashed in length, cutting crucial parts of the narrative. Over the decades, there have been several attempts to add back some of the cut material, but it was only when a badly marked 16mm copy of the whole film was discovered in a Buenos Aires film archive in 2008 that this almost-full restoration, complete with the re-recorded full original score, was possible.

The 25 minutes of latest additions may be grainy and scratched, but their greatest benefits are adding sense to the plot and boosting the virgin-and-whore characters of Maria/robot Maria, played by the entrancing 19-year-old Brigitte Helms. In this splendid DVD release, a 55-minute documentary and a 56-page booklet add even more value.

Metropolis was the most expensive silent movie ever; made with models and mirrors, multiple cameras in multiple versions of the set, and with many thousands of extras playing the worn-down workers marching to and from their work.

It is the architecture of both the city and the machines within it which have become the iconic visual images. But for me the scenes that stick in the mind are the slowly marching men; the orchestrated frenzy of their work; Freder's visions of Moloch and of the Seven Deadly Sins; robot Maria's erotic dancing, which drives the rich young men crazy; Freder's delirium and disintegration when he sees his father with her; robot Maria's manic look as she incites the workers to destroy the city – and their manic dancing once they have done so. This groundbreaking SF film isn't just a naïve (and often high camp) diatribe about the exploitation of the masses (though it is that); it's also an astonishing study of both personal and mass madness, compulsion and delusion.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict
WELCOME RESTORATION OF A VISUAL MASTERPIECE **9**

Not Like Others

Dir Peter Pontikis, Sweden 2008
Chelsea Films, £12.99

Vera and Vanja are two vampire sisters struggling to survive in the suburbs of Stockholm. Their peculiar relationship is shaken when Vera stabs and feeds on the leader of a skinhead biker gang in the toilets of a nightclub. The girls escape, knowing the bikers will be looking for revenge. While the distant roar of the motorcycles becomes a chilling menace, Vanja reveals to Vera her secret plans: she wants to leave their outcast lifestyle and run away with a human with whom she's fallen in love.

Not Like Others might not attain the virtuosity of cult classic *Let the Right One In*, another Swedish vampire drama, but it is surprisingly absorbing and thought-provoking. The supernatural element is suppressed; here the vampire becomes a mere outcast forced to feed on blood to subsist, and Vera uses a blade, not her fangs, to kill her victims. As in Romero's *Martin*, we can never be too sure about the real nature of the girls and the word "vampire" only appears in the original Swedish title, *Vampyrer*. Unlike in current mainstream vampire adaptations, Vera and Vanja don't possess superhero-like qualities either: their vulnerability, especially when contrasted with the raw violence of the skinhead gang, justifies their existential angst, which in turn makes them more sympathetic. Wisely, director Peter Pontikis makes their adversaries voiceless, their faces hidden under biker helmets. They become a shapeless menace, invested with an almost supernatural quality – always knowing where the girls will be next and riding in like harbingers of death.

With stark atmospheric settings and realistic performances, *Not Like Others* leaves out the gory details, concentrating instead on the complex relationship of the two sisters. Understated and minimalist, this film might well be the perfect antidote to the *Twilight* trend: these characters genuinely have a reason to feel angsty.

Maria J Pérez Cuervo

Fortean Times Verdict
A PLEASING ANTIDOTE TO THE VAMPIRE'S MAINSTREAMING **7**

The Horde

Dir Yannick Dahan and Benjamin Rocher, France 2009
Momentum Pictures Home Entertainment £12.99

The Horde is a French horror film which begins in copland but makes a swift *From Dusk Till Dawn*-style left turn very early on. It opens grittily, with grizzled police colliding with brutal drug dealers in a sordid high rise as they attempt to take revenge for a slain colleague. But there are zombies – hordes of them – and they move fast enough to make *28 Days Later* look more like *28 Days Behind*. The deadly enmity between the two sides must go if anyone is to survive the threat.

The on-screen violence is of the savagely sustained and blood-soaked kind, an onslaught which bludgeons the viewer visually and aurally. With no weapons to hand, survivors have to bash in the heads of the flesh-hungry undead with their bare knuckles. There's no real explanation for the apocalypse that explodes onto the city streets and spreads to the immigrant ghettos, unless humanity's propensity for vicious self-destruction, its running headlong towards a logical conclusion where demand will inevitably outstrip supply, can be counted as one. "It's like some sort of cry for help," one character muses while a logjam of zombies presses keening and clawing against locked glass doors. "No," says another, "they're starving to death." Even given the milieu of city slums, and the rampant racism of a barking mad elderly tenant decrying the influx of outsiders as he dispatches the flesh eaters, any intended sub-text tends to get lost in all that gore.

There are some stunning set pieces in Yannick Dahan and Benjamin Rocher's twin-helmed meat-mincer of a film. The sheer frenetic relentlessness of the uninfected humans, never mind the rabid zombies, reaches the point at which it surely has nowhere else to go. Admirably, the conclusion of the film is not wrapped up with a neat and redemptive Hollywood ribbon and bow for the least unlikeable characters. To the very end, *The Horde* is a big, raw and bloody hambone-cum-battering ram of a horror film.

Nick Cirkovic

Fortean Times Verdict
A GRITTILY GALLIC NEW ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE **7**

Call of Duty: Black Ops

PC £39.99 Xbox360 PS3 £49.99, Activision

I experienced an anti-*Avatar* moment with *Call of Duty: Black Ops*. Not because Sam Worthington (Jake Sully in Cameron's movie) voices the lead character Alex Mason, but because playing the game on PC proved to be akin to watching the film without 3D glasses. Denied that initial wave of euphoria until the marginally effective first PC patch was put out immediately after the game's release (while a wave of another kind went round the PC gaming forums about lag and stutter even on state-of-the-art gaming rigs) I seemed momentarily to step back from it all and ask myself whether, for all its bells-and-whistles, biggest-launch-of-the-year event status, the game was much of an advance upon those heady days of the first *Medal of Honor* with Omaha Beach and all. Well, for one thing the single player campaign then was longer, much longer than the current crop of war-based first person shooters, not just *Black Ops*. In fact, my memory might be playing me false, but expansion packs were almost as long as some of the latest single player campaigns! Never mind the width, feel the quality, I suppose. And quality-wise, the single player campaign of *Black Ops* is stylish enough, with the re-jigging of various elements and formulæ in any number of war and espionage shooters linked by the cutaways of covert operative Mason being tortured by his CIA handlers to uncover secrets which relate to a Soviet chemical weapons programme, code-named 'Nova 6'. The firefights are frenetic, and there are helicopters and vehicles to commandeer amid all the flying limbs and flak. The missions Mason fights his way through are full of bloody variety, although some of the challenge and suspense is undercut by the default-set insistence on spelling out what you should do. It may just be that *Black Ops* is another high-watermark example of the abbreviation of experience in the modern gaming world, in which everything leads, with increasing rapidity, to one deific destination: worldwide online multiplayer.

Where once the first port of call for an FPS was the single player campaign, a lengthy traversal through battle after battle and some memorable set pieces included, you feel grateful now if a single player campaign gets beyond five hours. Thankfully this one does (just about) and refreshingly it is set during the height of the Cold War in the 1960s, including a breakout from a Russian Gulag and a tour of Vietnam. There's a vicious conspiracy theory twist in the tale, too. For as long as it lasts, the single player really is rather excellent. Online, you can level up skill-wise to heady level numbers and snazzy insignia heights; a money rewards system, round by round, is included, with which you can purchase weapons upgrades or even bet against other players online and gamble your buying power. The maps are richly detailed, ranging from the expansive jungle scenario to the close quarters dead ringer for the nuclear test town in the latest Indiana Jones film. The zombie co-op mode is back, too, in which up to four players take on waves of shuffling flesh-chompers.

A while back, I reviewed *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* on 360 and the review was glowing; but when it comes down to it I'd be hard-pressed to put a sliver of paper between that and *COD: Black Ops* as an essential experience. Had I reviewed *Black Ops* on the console perhaps my review would have been as positive as that of *Modern Warfare 2*. But I didn't, and it isn't. With frustrating PC gameplay and partially effective patches not quite solving problems many PC gamers, including me, have experienced, I had enough time to ponder… and I'm left wondering where war-based FPS titles can go from here. *Medal of Honor*'s Omaha Beach, the German Paratroopers descending upon you at the missile site in *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* – just how far have things come on since then, really? This is – hopefully – not quite a rhetorical question. But it's doubtful that a 10-hour-plus game so good you can't wait to play it over immediately will ever be made again, certainly as long as that frenetic rush and hunger to get online, running around shooting things on the cusp of the clan party connection, continues. FPS war games will probably remain exactly where and what they are for the foreseeable future, mainly because there is no sign of there being any reason for them to do otherwise.

Nick Cirkovic

Fortean Times Verdict
HAS ONLINE CHOPS, BUT CAN'T LIVE UP TO PAST CAMPAIGNS **7**

Alan Wake: The Writer

Xbox 360 DLC 560MSP, Remedy Entertainment/Microsoft

"TAP TAP! TAP! The keys strike the walls of my skull like a possessed typewriter trapped in my mind. Captive words, desperate to escape. I open my eyes to darkness. I'm still here…"

Yes, we're back for more morose, introspective musings from our favourite self-hating author in the last episode of downloadable content (DLC) for *Alan Wake*, offering good value at 560MS points, or just under a fiver.

Here we find Alan conscious of his dilemma and struggling to navigate the nightmares of his subconscious as manifested by the Dark Presence. Everybody got that? It continues the theme of 'words have power' through hovering 'type' that Alan can activate when it is illuminated. The deadliest weapon he could dream up would be a thesaurus.

Remedy have a tendency to put their characters quite literally through plot development nightmares (Remember Max Payne's surreal dreams?), although here it's mainly to fill holes in the storyline or dangle another flashlight of truth in front of us. Unlike most DLC that merely provides further adventures non-critical to the main narrative, *Alan Wake: The Writer* at least offers new locations and expands on the plot without giving you the feeling that you've wandered down the wrong path.

Gone are the recycled arenas of the first DLC, replaced with more creative and harrowing sequences which, for the most part, engage the player through simple puzzles and imaginative traps. You begin to feel that Wake is gaining further control of The Dark Place, slowly turning from self-loathing to self help. Each new location in Alan's twisted psyche displays more creativity and each plot point brings greater development, giving you the sense that from these haunting shadows, Alan may finally wake.

Alexander Norman

Fortean Times Verdict
A DECENT EXPANSION WITH PLENTY OF FRESH INTEREST **8**

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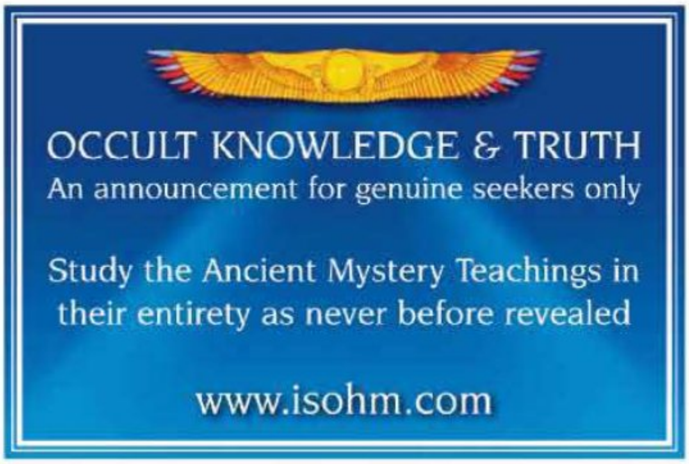

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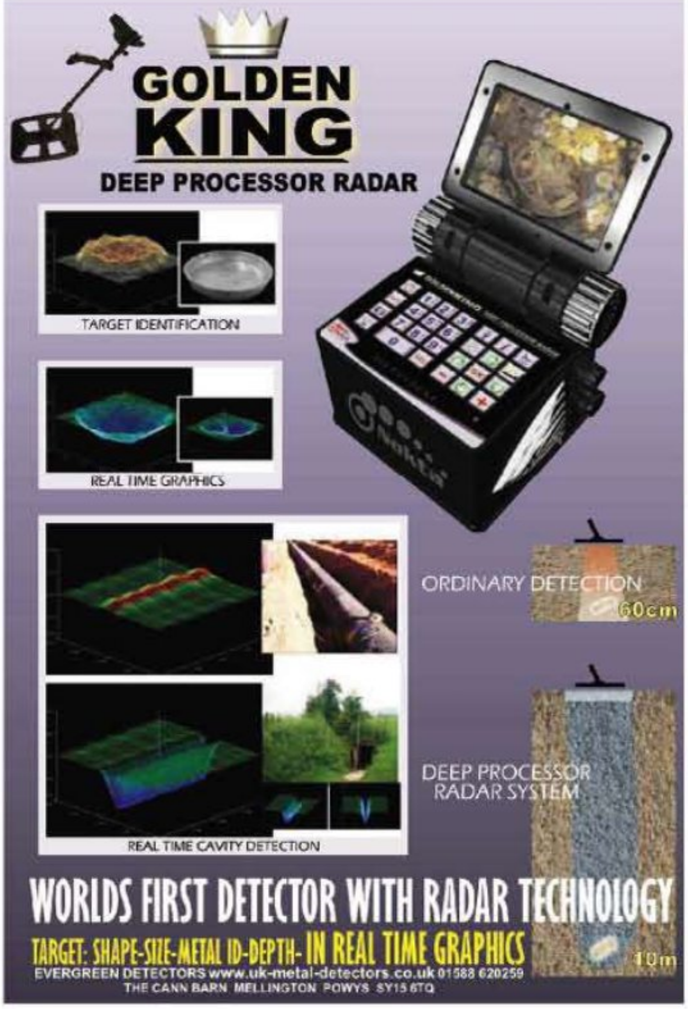

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Dear FT...

letters

The Odinist fellowship

Re your article on the Druid Network [**FT269:4–5**]: this was not the first pagan society to be accorded charitable status.

The Odinist Fellowship, representing Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic paganism, was first awarded charitable status on the grounds of the promotion of religion on 24 February 1988, a good 22 years ago, a status we retain. You can confirm this by consulting the Charity Commission website, referring to our charity registration number – 298688. At the time of our registration, as no polytheistic society had ever been awarded religious charitable status before, it was regarded as uncertain whether non-monotheistic religions could be recognised in this way. Our registration was therefore a great breakthrough for paganism in general. Only last year, we were also awarded charitable status by the Scottish equivalent of the Charity Commission, the Office for the Scottish Charity Regulator, which has taken over charity matters north of the border since devolution. Our Scottish charity number is SC040716.

The Odinist Fellowship is a pagan, polytheistic society and charity, which practises and promotes the polytheistic religion of the Anglo-Saxon and related Teutonic peoples of Northern Europe, and regards itself as the native and national faith of the English people. We worship and revere the native gods and goddesses of the English people, including Odin (also called Woden) the paramount deity or Allfather, Frigg, Thor, Balder, Tyr, Frey and Freya and many more. The mythology and ethical teachings of the Germanic peoples are preserved largely in the Icelandic 13th-century texts known as the Eddas, that is to say, the Elder Edda, which is a collection of ancient poetry, and the Younger Edda, which is a prose summary of the main legends and beliefs of olden times. However, other ancient sources of information about the religion, such as the Niebelungenlied, the Wayland Saga, the Heimskringla, numerous Icelandic sagas, *Beowulf*, and even Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, all give further evidence of our gods and beliefs concerning them from ancient times. This, then, is a brief outline of our Odinist faith, though you can find more information on our website: www.odinistfellowship.co.uk.

Ralph Harrison
Director, Odinist Fellowship, London

Mischief night

I really enjoyed the article about mischief night [**FT268:42–44**]. I work in a cafe in Belfast and a colleague in her mid-50s recently told me of how she used to tie the old steel bins to the resident's letterbox before knocking on the door and running, or tying an empty purse to a piece of string and hiding, waiting to pull it away when someone bent down to get it. I am 34 and, as a boy, posted raw eggs through people's letterboxes (something I'm not proud of).

Brendan McNally
Holywood, Co. Down, Northern Ireland

Pied Piper twist

Further to recent correspondence on The Pied Piper [**FT269:73**], readers might like to know about possibly the most sinister, and yet redeeming interpretation of the tale, which appears in Martin McDonagh's play *The Pillowman* (2003). In a story told within the play, a stranger shows up in Hamelin, and is rejected and treated badly by the townsfolk, save for a small boy, who offers him food. In return, the man crushes the boy's foot, breaking his toes and crippling him. Some time later, the man returns, as the Piper, and once rats have been removed and payment not made, he leads the children of Hamelin away… apart from the lame boy. This is a novel and ghoulish twist on the classic Grimm/Browning versions.

For *Sesame Street*'s take on the legend, see http://tinyurl.com/32ruc4v (YouTube).

Simon Woolley
By email

Noctilucent cloud

Here is a noctilucent ("night-shining") cloud photographed above Aberdeen in 2009.

Niccolo Capanni
By email

Editor's note: Normally seen in polar regions in the summer, clouds such as this are formed of tiny ice particles at an altitude of around 55 miles (88km), where temperatures can plunge below minus 130°C (–200°F) and winds peak at 300mph (480km/h). Because they are so high, the Sun is able to illuminate them from below the horizon. They appear more often during quiet periods in the Sun's 11-year cycle of activity when it is spewing out less ultraviolet radiation, which can keep temperatures too high for ice particle formation. The incidence of noctilucent clouds has increased with the build-up of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, which help cool the upper atmosphere.

Hexham Heads

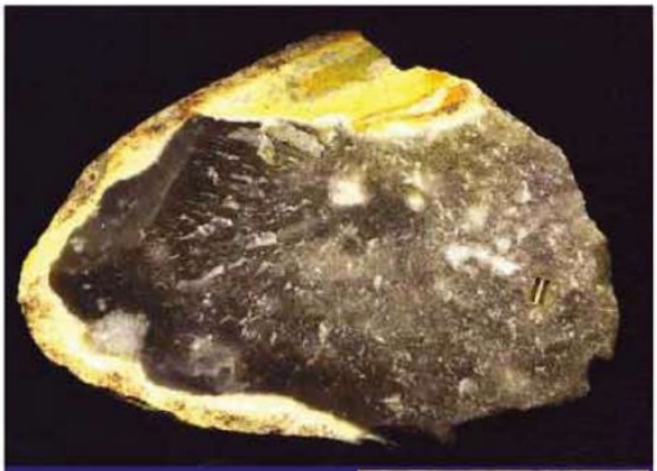
"The Cryptid Kid Investigates" comic strip [**FT268:79**] reminds me of a recent postscript to the intriguing Hexham Heads story, related in *Hampshire and the New Forest Stories of the Supernatural* by Sonia Smith (Countryside Books 2009). In chapter one, "The Werewolf of Southampton", the author describes the experience of Priscilla Morgan (possibly a pseudonym), a cleaner at Southampton University archæology department in the Seventies, at a time when the heads were being studied there.

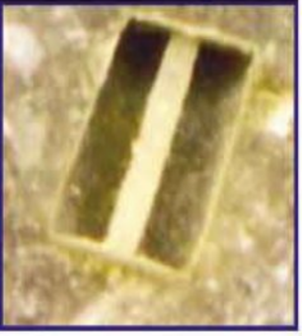
One evening, on seeing the heads, she was unsettled by their appearance and felt an invisible something had followed her home. Then, like Dr Anne Ross and the family in Northumberland, she had, along with her daughter, a full-on encounter with the 'werewolf'. I don't know if this account is previously recorded – or indeed true – but I thought I would bring it to your notice.

Nick Maloret
Milton, Hampshire

Editor's note: For more on the Hexham Heads, see **FT15:4–5, 59:43, 217:74, 220:74**.

letters





Trapped in flint

While trying my hand at flint-knapping, I broke open a nodule and noticed a small rectangular hollow shape with a rod of some kind inside it, embedded in the flint. Can anyone tell me what it is?

Peter Jenkins *Tilery, Cleveland*

Not just fruit bats

I was very interested to read about Dr Gareth Jones and his claim that the short-nosed fruit bat is the only animal to enjoy fellatio other than human beings [**FT269:18**]. While visiting San Diego Zoo in 1993, I was at the bonobo (pygmy chimp) enclosure when a young female and the alpha male began to indulge in this sexual act. It was a memorable sight, made that much more unforgettable by the presence of a band of schoolchildren who demanded that their teacher tell them why "the monkeys [*sic*] were eating one another".

Richard Luck
By email

Sidereal geography?

Richard Stanley ("The door into summer", **FT266:56–57**) talks of "the all but vanished art of siderial geography". Presumably he means "sidereal" – but what is it? Is it the same as "sacred geometry"?

Anthony Riddell
East Brunswick, Victoria, Australia

Blue spider

About 20 years ago I found, and caught, a blue spider in our garden in Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire. I went to a local pet shop – but they had no clue. I went to the library and checked all the spider books – nothing like it. I telephoned the Natural History Museum – they didn't believe it. I checked the Internet (it was quite rudimentary then) – nothing. On day three, it died. That weekend, I happened to look over a neighbour's fence and saw his newly resprayed motorbike – it was the same shade of blue.

Paul Atton
By email

Coming in peace

I did chuckle at the sideline in which Iran's president says of a new bomber plane, "The jet, as well as being an ambassador of death for the enemies of humanity, has a main message of peace and friendship" [**FT269:9**]. But it also struck me that this is a perfect example of how much of a part cultural prejudices and hegemonic propaganda play in determining what we find odd. If I were to send in a clip in which the British PM, or the US President, was quoted as saying "Nuclear weapons could destroy life on Earth, but the only reason we have them is to guarantee a lasting peace," would you print it?

Of course not – and yet the two sentiments are absolutely identical.

Mat Coward
Frome, Somerset

Dowsing engineer

Yesterday (15th November), I saw a Southern Water engineer dowsing outside the old Eastwoods garden centre here in Brighton. I asked him about it and he said that it wasn't common practice but that he'd found that he had an aptitude for it. I was quite chuffed, as I have heard about some plumbers and water engineers using dowsing but had never seen it. I have no idea where dowsing currently stands in the estimation of mainstream science, but I presume it's quite low. I would be interested to hear about any other examples of plumbers/employees of regional water companies using dowsing in the course of their work.

Oliver Tate
By email

Operation Mistletoe

In the article on the "Magical Battle of Britain" [**FT267:34–41**], the so-called 'Operation Mistletoe' is mentioned in relation to Aleister Crowley. This operation was allegedly an anti-Nazi magical ritual performed in Ashdown Forest in Sussex in the early days of World War II. The article claims it was instigated by Commander Ian Fleming, the wartime deputy-director of the Navy Intelligence Department, and involved Crowley.

I was told by the late Cecil Williamson, founder of the Museum of Witchcraft now based at Boscastle in Cornwall and an MI6 officer in WWII, that he was involved in 'Operation Mistletoe' and that it was a joint MI5/MI6 'black' propaganda operation. He told me he had been recruited into MI6 or the SIS (Secret Intelligence Service) in 1938 by a 'Major Ted Maltby' during an interview at the Passport Office in Central London. Because of Williamson's knowledge of and contacts in the occult world, Maltby asked him to go undercover in Germany and compile a list of leading Nazi party members involved in occultism.

Before the war, MI6 was indeed based in the Passport Office buildings near Queen Anne's Gate and its officers abroad used the cover of passport officers working in British embassies. According to Michael Smith's new book *Six: A History of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service* (Dialogue 2010, pp375–76), a Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Maltby was deputy-director of Section VIII of MI6 producing wireless transmitters and radio networks for SIS agents working abroad. Williamson himself worked during the war for the Political Warfare Executive connected to MI6 and the SOE (Special Operations Executive) based near Station X (Bletchley Park). His job was to supervise mobile radio stations in southern England broadcasting 'black' propaganda to German U-boats patrolling the North Sea and the Atlantic.

Coincidentally, Lt Col Maltby was related by marriage to the occultist Dion Fortune, who also worked magically during the war against the Nazis. Fortune's magical partner in her pre-war group the Fraternity of the Inner Light was Colonel Charles Seymour. He and Maltby probably knew each other, as during the war Seymour was also an SIS officer. In fact, he eventually became the head of the Dutch section of the SOE.

The article on 'Operation Mistletoe' mentions that soldiers were dressed up in magical robes to represent occultists. Williamson told me they were Canadian troops temporarily based in Ashdown Forest and the 'magical robes' were improvised from standard issue army blankets. These were then decorated with occult symbols taken by Williamson from the mediæval grimoire *The Key of Solomon*. It has always puzzled me that they were Canadian soldiers, until I found out that a Canadian engineering battalion had been based in Ashdown Forest to erect a radio transmitter supplied from the United States.

So perhaps there is some truth in the story about 'Operation Mistletoe'. However, I would agree with the *FT* article that Crowley was not involved in it. It is known that he was a long-time SIS agent, but he seems to have missed out on this particular operation.

Michael Howard
London

Punny ha ha

I've been reading *FT* for nearly 20 years and I'm beginning to wonder if you are losing your touch: the letter connecting migraines, alien contact cases and ill-fitting bras [**FT268:71**] really should have had the headline "small cups cause saucers".

Andy Froud
Clitheroe, Lancashire

Living pterodactyl

I'm wondering if the "living pterodactyl" captured near Micronesia in 1873 [**FT267:32**] might not have been an Asian fruit bat. Some species grow so large that they're colloquially called the "flying fox". Its appearance must have been most remarkable to sailors unfamiliar with such a creature. Although they feed on fruit, it's not hard to imagine a bat using its teeth against somebody trying to capture or restrain it. I realise this opens up other questions, such as why was this creature alone when fruit bats tend to fly in huge flocks; but is there any fact that positively excludes this hypothesis?

Hal C Pattee
Utica, New York

Schrödinger's Cat

Mat Coward's claim [**FT267:17**] that Schrödinger's real intention was to parody quantum mechanics with his 'cat' example is correct. The Schrödinger example was an attempt to challenge a central quantum claim, that the observer influences the outcome of certain experiments with wave particles, in that they may be perceived as being in one state or another, depending on how they are perceived. Thus, if one state leads to a dead cat, and the other to a live one, then in what state is the cat when no one is looking? While this paradox has led to all sorts of speculations, the fact that this is a 'thought experiment' tends to get overlooked.

But not by Wittgenstein, who cut to the chase with his claim that: "A thought experiment comes to much the same as an experiment which is sketched or painted or described instead of being carried out. And so the result of a thought experiment is the fictitious result of a fictitious experiment." (*Philosophical Grammar*, p155)

It is not just that a real experiment is something that is physically carried out; it is the fact that a real experiment might have a totally unexpected outcome. Many examples from chemistry could be cited, where adding A to B did not produce the expected C, but resulted in Z. While I might conjecture many possible outcomes to a thought experiment, it stands to reason that I couldn't imagine an outcome that I can't already imagine. Thus the 'thought experiment', however intriguing, is essentially nothing more than the expression of a pre-existing mind-set that bedevils so much of science.

Of course, anyone with access to a good physics laboratory could set up the experiment for real. Just don't expect to get funding from the RSPCA.

Mike Harding
London

Playing the lottery

James Dixon is mistaken in saying that if we understood the odds of winning the national lottery, we wouldn't play it [**FT269:75**]. Most players have a good idea of the odds; I buy one ticket for every draw, and expect to win a share of the jackpot once in every 134,433 years. But we gamblers do more than merely calculate the odds. We go on to incorporate the odds in an opportunity calculation: cost of playing, chance of winning, reward for winning. In the case of the Lottery: cost negligible, odds poor, potential reward very large.

The acme of opportunity calculation is SETI, the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence. Millions of dollars are spent on a gamble whose odds are generally reckoned to be very remote indeed. But the potential reward is such that the gamble is considered worthwhile by important, statistics-aware scientists like the late Carl Sagan.

Donald Rooum
London

Stonehenge and Druids

Your report about the recognition of modern Druidry by the Charity Commission [**FT269:4**] repeats an "academic myth" that has now been laid to rest – that Druids cannot have built Stonehenge (and other stone circles) because they arrived too late. This notion, accepted up until as little as a decade ago, replaced the earlier position that the Druids were too early since Stonehenge was obviously built by the Greeks, Romans, Saxons or even Vikings! Then, in the Victorian period, the idea arose that the "Celts" arrived at the beginning of the Iron Age (about 500 BC), slaughtering the previous occupants and bringing their Druids with them. When it became clear that the stone circles went up in the Neolithic period, it was decided that the Druids had arrived long after.

The only trouble with this is that there is no evidence for an Iron Age invasion around 500 BC, no battle sites, no mass graves, and no cultural discontinuity (as evidenced by decorations on pots, for example). Instead it just seems that the secrets of smelting iron were learnt around this time by existing Bronze Age smiths in Britain. The idea that each new "age" brought genocidal invaders was a convenient Victorian myth that helped excuse British Imperial adventurism, just as the lumping together of pre-Roman peoples as "the Celts" helped spread the notion of the gentle sensible Anglo-Saxons at the heart of the Isles, with the descendants of wild barbarians pushed to the edges. Recent genetic research shows this to be a myth too, as the people most resembling the older inhabitants of Kent are the Welsh.

And we also know that there is at least one person descended from the mother of 9,000-year-old "Cheddar Man" living a few miles from the cave his bones were found in. It is clear that there has been genetic continuity from the Middle Stone Age, and there is no archæological reason to suppose there was a break in cultural and religious tradition from the New Stone Age to the Iron Age. All we can say is that the stone circles were designed by a specialist caste with knowledge of astronomy, and the oldest word that we have for such a caste is Druid.

Steve Wilson
Media Officer,
Council of British Druid Orders

David V Barrett replies: *Steve Wilson's argument may or may not have some validity, but as Prof. Ronald Hutton, the foremost expert on the Druids, says, historical evidence for the Druids in Britain "consists of a molehill of completely unreliable material. On this a mountain of literature was to be built". In short, Steve's guess is as good as mine or anyone else's.*

Wait, earthlings! I have travelled across many galaxies with a vital message for your kind!
Shit, what was it now?
Husband

TONY HUSBAND

it happened to me...

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Precognitive dreams

I believe that dreaming about things that come true – or occasionally almost true – at a later date is not uncommon. I have had the experience many times. Two recent ones come to mind. The first was when I dreamed that I was with my wife in a long, low building in the company of several small people. The dream occurred between six and seven in the morning. A few hours later, at about 11am, we were in Rhos on Sea in North Wales when a small, elderly gentleman who was standing against a lamp post asked, very politely, if we would care to join his friends in the chapel over the road for coffee and biscuits. We did – and it was a long, low building and all the very nice people inside were small and elderly.

More recently and rather more intriguingly: I dreamed that I was with my wife in the lounge and the time was about 4pm. The doorbell rang and when I answered it there was a polite young man wearing a jacket and collar and tie. He was very apologetic, said he was very sorry but he was in need of a toilet. The next 'clip' in the dream was that my wife and I were standing with our backs to the fireplace when he walked past us – without being directed – to the toilet in the back lobby. I remarked to my wife, "Seems to know the way." A few minutes later, he said thanks and left.

The following day, again we were both in the lounge in the afternoon, this time not dreaming, the doorbell went and the young girl from next door said she was very sorry to bother us but she was just home from school and did not have her house key and needed the loo. She walked straight through the lounge to the toilet; of course she knew where it was, as she lived in a similar house; so, like the man in the dream, she did not need to be told where to find it.

The rather startling bit was a couple of weeks later. Same time in the afternoon, and again not a dream. The doorbell went. Polite young man on the doorstep wearing an identification badge and carrying one of those electronic gadgets that meter readers use. Said he was very sorry, he had just read the electric meter, but needed to use the toilet. This one had to be shown the way.

ETIENNE GILFILLAN

I try hard to figure out how it works. I seem to remember reading in St Augustine's *Confessions*, the good saint asking God how it is we can see in the future something that has not yet happened. If he was baffled, who am I to complain? My best guess is that our lives are happening in a slightly different way in another dimension, just a short time before they happen here. Anyone got a better idea?

Doug Hall
Knaresborough, North Yorkshire

Spectral show

For six years, I worked as a sound engineer in a busy seaside theatre – the Wellington Theatre, Marine Parade, Great Yarmouth. It sure was a spooky place when you were in there on your own, especially in the auditorium, which had a most unnerving atmosphere, and there were always rumours of a ghost – as in most theatres – but none of the people I worked with in there ever saw anything – except me.

We had a very famous touring comedian in on a three-day run and he brought a big-ass PA system – a 5k rig – with him that had to be left set up in the theatre overnight. We'd had a spate of break-ins around that time and a member of staff had to stay in the theatre overnight to watch the equipment and keep it safe. I was that member of staff. I took some ribbing from the others about getting spooked in the night or having to chase away thieves, but I was the only one with the testicular prowess to actually stay the night – and there was extra money in it for me.

Once everyone had left the building, I walked the entire place, securing the fire exits and turning off all the electrics. I lowered the safety curtain in front of the stage and retreated to the bar area at the front of the theatre which was the only part of the whole place I was prepared to sleep in. The dim light from the glass-fronted beer coolers behind the bar was a nice compromise between total darkness and having the lights blazing all night long. I guess the time was around midnight. I picked a sofa next to the front doors and lay down to sleep.

Sometime later, I was woken by a loud banging close by. I sat up and both sets of swinging doors to the right and left of the bar area which led to and from the auditorium were swinging violently and banging loudly. As if that wasn't scary enough, I could see light behind the doors – light that appeared to be coming from the auditorium.

My heart was pounding as I crept across the bar and steadied the doors. Had someone broken in? I headed to the main auditorium and passed the stairs that led to the upper seating tier. There was light pouring down the stairs. Then my heart skipped a beat as I heard the music coming from the auditorium. It was an out-of-tune piano playing some kind of music hall tune with a warbling, female falsetto accompaniment.

I had to check the auditorium and the stage area, so I headed to the last set of double doors that opened directly into the back row of seats on the ground level. There was definitely music coming from the stage so I grabbed the door handle and was about to open it when the whole auditorium burst into applause and light cheers. Having worked in the place for years, I knew what a full house sounded like and there was one behind the door I was about to open.

The applause went on as I plucked up the courage to open the door. I managed to push it open about two or three inches before I bottled out and ran away, but I did see inside. There were two people on stage. A man in a black suit and a tall hat sat at an upright piano with both hands clasped to his chest in what I think is an old fashioned gesture of thanks. At the front of the stage was a woman in a big scarlet dress with dark hair in ringlets. She was bowing to the audience. I could only see a few seats through the gap, but they were occupied. The nearest ones to the door were maybe five metres (16ft) away and the only thing I can remember about their occupants was slicked-back hair and big hats. I ran out as fast as I could. As I passed through the bar area, I heard more applause and briefly wondered who had come though the bar area in the first place, banging the doors and waking me up.

I did see one other thing before I ran. We had gas lamps in the theatre. They were left over from Victorian times and were very ornamental, and sometimes quite a talking point. They were obviously redundant and had not been plumbed into the gas supply for many years, but in that auditorium on that night a phantom show was playing for a phantom audience and the gas lamps were burning brightly.

I ran home and didn't lock the front doors of the bar after me. I came back at first light. There had been no burglary, thank God. I told my dad, who was the general manager at the time of my experience, and he said that he'd heard some things from the previous owners about people hearing music in the place at night. No one stayed in the theatre the next night. I've never been as scared as I was that night. The place has been demolished now and a bowling alley built in its place and to be honest... I'm glad. This happened over 10 years ago.

Grant Hudson
Great Yarmouth, Norfolk

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FT aims to present the widest range of interpretations to stimulate discussion and welcomes helpful criticism. The opinions of contributors are not necessarily those of the editors. *FT* can take no responsibility for submissions, but will take all reasonable care of material in its possession. Requests for return of material should be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope or an International Reply Coupon.

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Regular clipsters have provided the lifeblood of *Fortean Times* since it began in 1973. One of the delights for the editors is receiving packets of clips from Borneo or Brazil, Saudi Arabia or Siberia. We invite you to join in the fun and send in anything weird, from trade journals, local newspapers, extracts from obscure tomes, or library newspaper archives.

To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: 8 Jan 2011. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

Mail to: Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP, UK
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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data was ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

Special Correspondents

AUSTRALIA Graham Cordon (SA), Tony Healy (ACT), John Palazzi (NSW), Len Watson (Qld). **CANADA** Brian Chapman (BC), Graham Conway (BC). **CYBERSPACE** Richard Alexander, John F Callahan, Hugh Henry, Neil L Inglis, Michael Newton, Steve Scanlon. **ENGLAND** Gail-Nina Anderson, Louise Bath, Claire Blamey, Peter Christie, Mat Coward, Paul Farthing, George Featherston, Paul Gallagher, Alan Gardiner, Keith George, Anne Hardwick, Richard Lowke, Alexis Lykiard, Diana Lyons, Dave Malin, Nick Maloret, Valerie Martin, Tom Ruffles, Meryl Santis, Paul Screeton, Gary Stocker, Roman Suchyj, Frank Thomas, Paul Thomas, Nick Warren, Ion Will, Bobby Zodiac. **FINLAND** Heather Fowler. **FRANCE** Michel Meurger. **GERMANY** Ulrich Magin, Cliff Wren. **HOLLAND** Robin Pascoe. **IRELAND** Andy Conlon, Pat Corcoran, Andrew Munro. **ISRAEL** Zvi Ron. **NEW ZEALAND** Peter Hassall. **ROMANIA** Iosif Boczor. **SCOTLAND** Roger Musson, Leslie John Thomson. **SWEDEN** Sven Rosén. **THAILAND** Chris Williams. **TURKEY** Izzet Goksu. **USA** Loren Coleman (ME), Jim Conlan (CT), Myron Hoyt (ME), Dolores Phelps (TX), Jim Riecken (NY), Ron Rosenblatt (NY), Joseph Trainor (MA), Jeffrey Vallance (CA), Gary Yates (UT). **WALES** Janet & Colin Bord.

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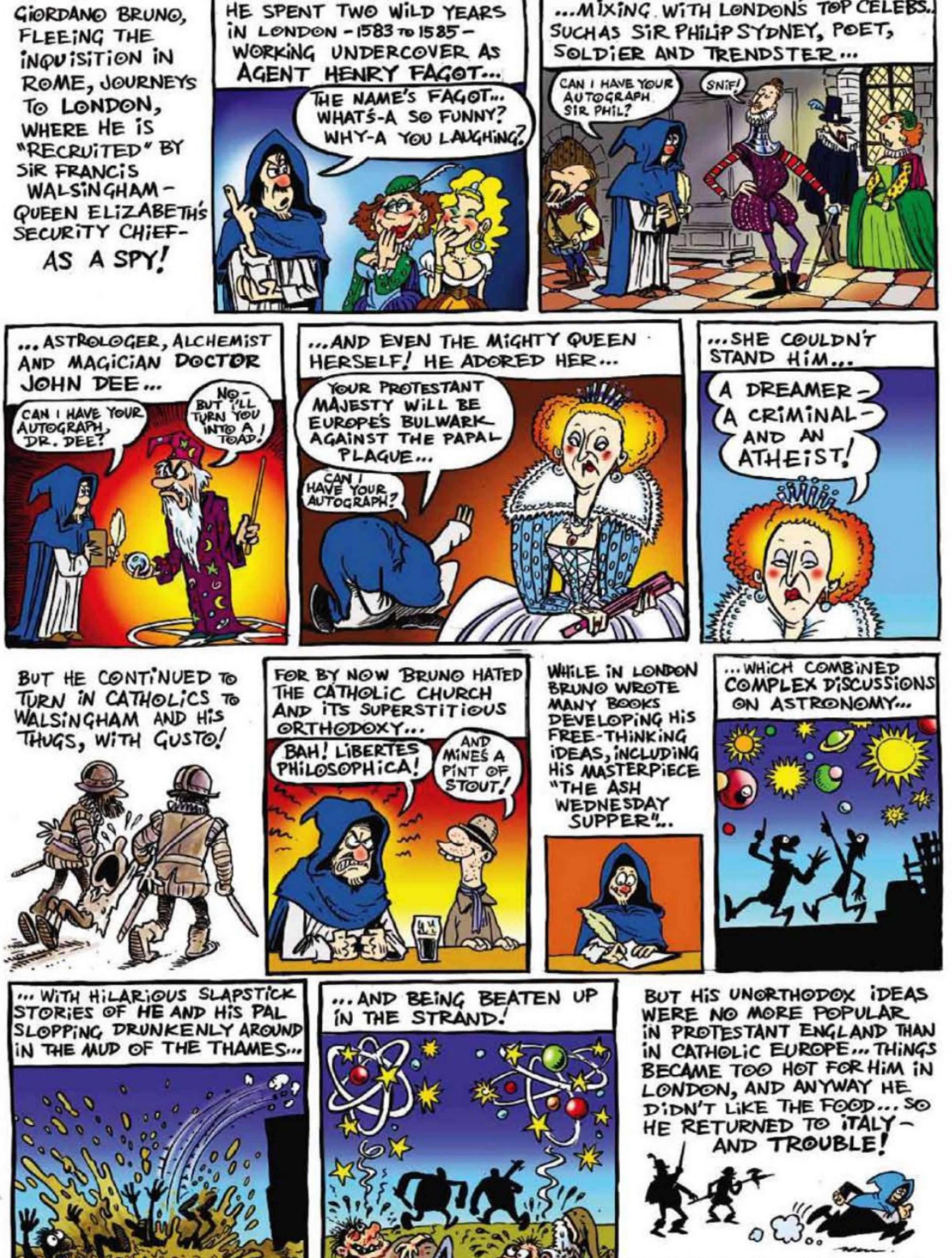
PHENOMENOMIX The Life of GIORDANO BRUNO Part 3

HUNT EMERSON
and KEVIN JACKSON


GIORDANO BRUNO, FLEEING THE INQUISITION IN ROME, JOURNEYS TO LONDON, WHERE HE IS "RECRUITED" BY SIR FRANCIS WALSINGHAM - QUEEN ELIZABETH'S SECURITY CHIEF - AS A SPY!
HE SPENT TWO WILD YEARS IN LONDON - 1583 TO 1585 - WORKING UNDERCOVER AS AGENT HENRY FAGOT...
THE NAME'S FAGOT... WHAT'S-A SO FUNNY? WHY-A YOU LAUGHING?
...MIXING WITH LONDON'S TOP CELEBS.. SUCH AS SIR PHILIP SYDNEY, POET, SOLDIER AND TRENDSTER...
CAN I HAVE YOUR AUTOGRAPH SIR PHIL?
SNIF!
... ASTROLOGER, ALCHEMIST AND MAGICIAN DOCTOR JOHN DEE...
CAN I HAVE YOUR AUTOGRAPH, DR. DEE?
NO - BUT I'LL TURN YOU INTO A TOAD!
...AND EVEN THE MIGHTY QUEEN HERSELF! HE ADORED HER...
YOUR PROTESTANT MAJESTY WILL BE EUROPE'S BULWARK AGAINST THE PAPAL PLAGUE...
CAN I HAVE YOUR AUTOGRAPH?
...SHE COULDN'T STAND HIM...
A DREAMER - A CRIMINAL - AND AN ATHEIST!
BUT HE CONTINUED TO TURN IN CATHOLICS TO WALSINGHAM AND HIS THUGS, WITH GUSTO!
FOR BY NOW BRUNO HATED THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND ITS SUPERSTITIOUS ORTHODOXY...
BAH! LIBERTES PHILOSOPHICA!
AND MINE'S A PINT OF STOUT!
WHILE IN LONDON BRUNO WROTE MANY BOOKS DEVELOPING HIS FREE-THINKING IDEAS, INCLUDING HIS MASTERPIECE "THE ASH WEDNESDAY SUPPER"...
...WHICH COMBINED COMPLEX DISCUSSIONS ON ASTRONOMY...
... WITH HILARIOUS SLAPSTICK STORIES OF HE AND HIS PAL SLOPPING DRUNKENLY AROUND IN THE MUD OF THE THAMES...
... AND BEING BEATEN UP IN THE STRAND!
BUT HIS UNORTHODOX IDEAS WERE NO MORE POPULAR IN PROTESTANT ENGLAND THAN IN CATHOLIC EUROPE... THINGS BECAME TOO HOT FOR HIM IN LONDON, AND ANYWAY HE DIDN'T LIKE THE FOOD... SO HE RETURNED TO ITALY - AND TROUBLE!
FIND OUT WHAT SORT OF TROUBLE NEXT ISSUE, IN THE FINAL PART OF... THE LIFE OF GIORDANO BRUNO!

COMING NEXT MONTH

ALL-SEEING EYES

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO REMOTE VIEWING?

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ATLANTIS RISING

STAN GOOCH AND THE LOST NEANDERTHAL CIVILISATION

+

TATZELWURM SIGHTINGS, ISOBEL GOWDIE, ORB EVIDENCE AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 272

ON SALE 3 FEB 2011

HUGO PIETTE

TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND *FORTEAN TIMES* FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM *FT*'S PAST.

FEBRUARY 1981

Early on the morning of the 11th, a cleaner at work in St Mary's church, in Thorpe, Surrey, was surprised to find a smartly dressed woman kneeling in a pew. Not wishing to disturb her, the cleaner went about her work quietly until, sometime later, she realised the woman hadn't moved. She told the vicar, who called an ambulance. A closer inspection found that the woman was dead. She had no identification, was not known locally and her identity – as well as the cause of death – remained unknown. **FT39:24**

Hundreds of small stones rained down on a petrol station in Aversa, southern Italy. The manager, Nicola Grassia, and his son Enzo, 12, were frightened when they could not see where the stones were coming from. They stopped a passing police car to report it. As the officers stepped out of the car, "a stone shattered one of its windows; another badly damaged the bodywork," said Grassia. "The policemen were so scared that they fired warning bursts into the air with their machine guns." A search of the environs failed to find any culprit. The event – which may have happened in January, but was reported in early February – corresponds to others on file of stone-throwing poltergeists, whatever they are. There was some suggestion that vengeful ghosts might be involved, as the garage was where Grassia's father had shot dead his mother seven years earlier. **FT35:43**

In China's Hunan province, people living in the vicinity of Dongting Lake were reported to be concerned about strange cries for help. They said they emanated from a huge rock that jutted out into the lake. In response to the suggestion that they were the cries of drowning sailors who might have been wrecked there, the media proposed a local version of Nigel Kneale's 'Stone Tape' theory; that the rock was magnetic and activated when the temperature and sunlight were 'just right'. **FT35:36**

FEBRUARY 1991

Early in 1991, the skies above Uzbekistan were "teeming with flying saucers", according to Tass, Russia's official news agency, which cited the following extraordinary report from two Central Asian sources. In the town of Daugyztau, three teenagers spotted some objects they described as "truncated pyramids covered with metal scales", each topped with what looked like two antennæ. To make matters more surreal, they had wings covered in metal scales and moved by hopping in great leaps. When the frightened teens lobbed stones at the mechanical nightmares, the missiles bounced off an apparently invisible barrier. Suddenly, one of the winged pyramids lunged at the youngest as though trying to grab him. They fled screaming to the nearby house of a drilling foreman. It reads more like a classic 'mass hysteria' episode than a UFO encounter; however, the foreman found 8in by 2in (20x5cm) holes at 16ft (5m) intervals and "UFO experts" detected strong magnetic traces at the site. **FT61:20**

We rarely hear of the Odinists; in fact many might be surprised that worship of the old Norse gods is alive and well. In 1988, the Odinist Fellowship became the first polytheistic group to be granted Registered Charity status in the UK (see letter, p73). This month, 1,000 Odinists recited a special prayer at their "hearth moots", calling on Odin's shieldmaidens for aid in the Iraq War then raging. "Gracious Valkyries grant them victory," they chanted. "Frigga, Nanna, Sif and Freya be their guides and their comfort [..] For Odin sings under their shields as the warriors stride with might." **FT57:9**

FEBRUARY 2001

Following recent austerity measures by a new government on the Caribbean island of Dominica, more and more people were risking their lives in dilapidated boats to escape to other islands. In a week when 45 people were believed drowned, news came of the unusual survival of 16 refugees. Three days after setting off in a homemade boat, their compass was broken and they were out of food, water and petrol. In a bad way by the fifth day, one woman, Faustina Mercedes, 31, who had left behind her one-year-old daughter, asked her sister Elena, 24, to try some of her breast milk. Soon, Faustina was keeping the others – eight men and five women – alive with a few small gulps of her milk each day. On the 11th day, they sighted land. Currents threatened to move them away, but they broke planks off the boat's side and rowed to shore. Soon they were back in Dominica, glad to be alive and grateful to their "Little Angel of the Sea". **FT146:8**

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